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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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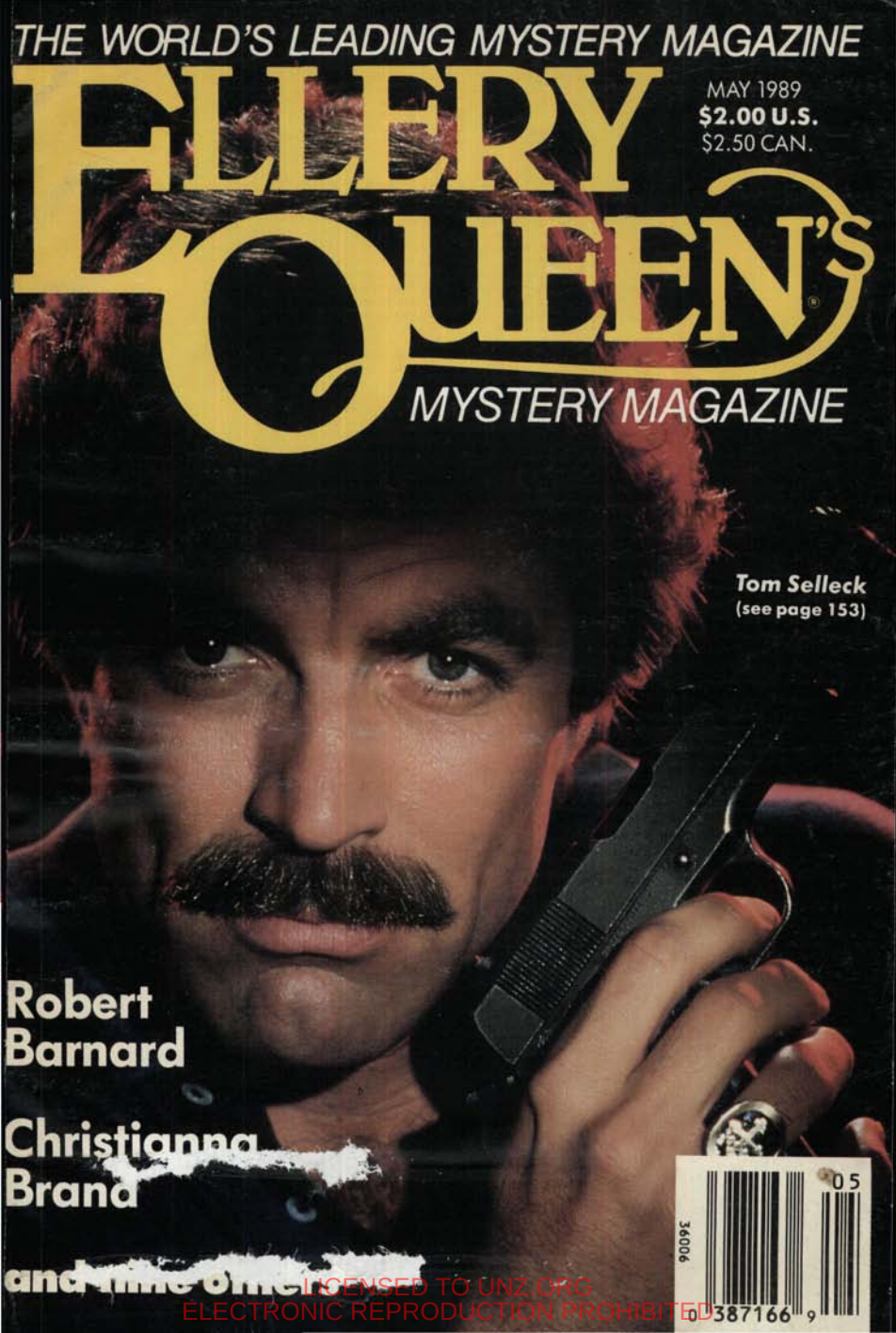

Tom Selleck
(see page 153)

Robert Barnard

Christianna Brand

and [illegible]

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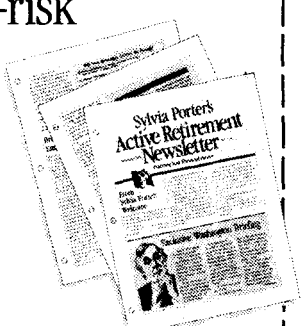

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On our cover is
TOM SELLECK

Cover Photograph by Tony Esparza/CBS

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first publication in the U.S.

This Inspector Cockrill story was the last Christianna Brand submitted to her agent before her death on March 11, 1988. Anthony Boucher remarked on her "precise knowledge of how to plant a clue so that it is completely fair and apparently meaningless" and her "power to produce an astounding Least Suspected Person whose guilt is as convincing as it is surprising."

Christianna was British-born, in Malaya, in 1907. After a series of odd jobs—governess, waitress, receptionist, ballroom dancer, interior decorator, secretary, model, dress packer—she wrote her first novel, Death in High Heels *(1941), which is being reprinted, along with her ingenious* Green for Danger, *by Carroll & Graf . . .*

THE ROCKING CHAIR

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

The crowd grew restless as the visiting vicar droned on. All they really wanted was a proper good look at her ladyship's hat. "It's never that old straw with a couple of flowers from the garden pinned on in front?"

The Duchess sat waiting her turn, oblivious of it all. Her mind was a million miles away, conning over what her visitor had told her about the three dead ladies.

Fifteen years ago. She recalled the case but only very vaguely. A house by the lakeside on the island—St. Martha's Island, that was, off the Cornish coast—and in the sitting room, three women lying dead, spread out like a trefoil clover-leaf, their poor heads forming the center point. Shot at very close range. Three shots fired, no more—almost certainly by one or other of themselves—but the weapon so splashed with blood that no fingerprints could be lifted from it. Two quiet, pleasant, harmless sisters, known to everyone

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on the island, and a younger woman known to nobody anywhere. To this day, it had never been established who in the world she could have been.

But the Duchess's visitor knew, and all these years later had come to consult her as to what should be done about it. The visitor was a not entirely lovable old party called Miss Maud Trumble, rich and famous author of dozens of really quite terrible books. Why anybody who could have changed her name to Dawn Cloud or something should go on calling herself Maud Trumble was beyond the Duchess's imagining.

"And will therefore ask her Grace to declare the bazaar open!" concluded the vicar, raising his voice to a light bellow to alert her ladyship, who appeared to be three-quarters asleep. The Duchess came to with a start and said in her clear, carrying, bazaar-opening voice, "Oh—is it me?"

The hat had been well worth waiting for. She shed a few peony petals as, bowing her thanks to right and left, she scrambled arthritically down from the platform and forced her guest on a round of the produce stalls. "I'll have some of that jam—it looks quite delicious."

"It's the rhubarb lot that cook sent down from the Castle, m'lady—"

"Oh, my goodness, then I certainly won't! Thank you, Peggy, for the warning." She bent a searching gaze upon the stall-holder. "You *are* Peggy, aren't you? Peggy-with-the-glasses-on, that our dear chauffeur Bill married?"

"No, your Grace, I'm Peggy-a-bit-deaf that he ought to have married. Her, he had to," she added with a pious sniff. "Which is different."

"Oh, yes, it is, *isn't* it?" said the Duchess, vaguely effusive, and hurried Miss Trumble away. "That'll teach me to show off to you," she said ruefully, "the aristocracy being gracious with the peasantry." But she had spotted a friend in the crowd. "There's Chief Inspector Cockrill—just the person we want! He'll help us."

"After the debacle of our three dead ladies," said Miss Trumble stiffly, "we on the island have little faith in the mainland police. However, by all means bring the gentleman in. I shall have much pleasure in putting him through his paces."

"Oh, dear!" said the Duchess. "Perhaps—"

"No, no, I insist. He looks hardly up to my metal," said the lady, and indeed Inspector Cockrill—small, elderly, hot, and rather cross,

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a battered straw hat breasting the fine spray of his greying hair—was hardly an awe-inspiring figure. Miss Trumble approached him, nevertheless, with a rapid resume of the situation.

Her Grace intervened with hasty introductions. "So do come home, Cockie—the car's here and we could have a little booze-up."

"What—at three o'clock on a boiling hot afternoon?" said the Inspector. But he capitulated, and half an hour later, sinking back into a chair in her big, untidy private sitting room up at the Castle with a cup of tea in his hand, prompted: "Well, tell me about the ladies."

"The Ladies'?" said the Duchess, startled. "I was only there for an hour or so, I didn't need—"

"The ladies, the *ladies!* Perhaps, Miss Trumble," said the Inspector, whose time was not unlimited, "you would care to outline the case for me? I remember very little about it."

"Then I will inform you," said Miss Trumble, "of what the police had at the time to work on." She plonked down the facts before him *like small dollops of cold porridge.* "*Two sisters. Mrs. Cray, Rosemary,* aged fifty-seven—Miss Rosalie Twining, five years younger. Quiet, harmless, charming. Mrs. Cray extremely religious from her convent days. —Devoted to one another," said Miss Trumble, relaxing the chill a little, "and loved by all. In our tiny community, loved by all."

"And then this young woman?"

"Aged thirty-two or thereabouts. Very neat and tidy—exceptionally so," said Miss Trumble, looking coldly upon the Inspector, whose appearance certainly did not enter into this category. "Health had been good—well, up to then. No informative dental work. Clothes very ordinary—"

"What exactly was she wearing?"

"I'll tell you what she was wearing," said Miss Trumble. "She was wearing a pendant—imitation scarab set in gold." She added offhandedly that the two ladies were wearing identical pendants, and again deflected attention by bringing it sharply to the most important point of all, the dead girl's face. The bullet that had killed her had gone rather high. Nothing too dreadful, said Miss Trumble with a shudder, but—unrecognizable.

"And no one ever did recognize her? There must have been wide publicity. But then, of course, no photograph would have helped. And on the island?"

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"Nobody. Not even in the shops. And yet there'd been a breakfast—coffee and rolls."

"But how long had she been there?"

"Two nights at least. The last ferry had been at half past five on the Monday evening, and they died on the Wednesday morning."

"Ferry tickets?"

"No dice there. But there's no other way for her to have got to the island, and you can take that from me flat," said Miss Trumble, perhaps guiltily aware that very few other facts had been given to them absolutely flat.

"You didn't see her yourself, Miss Trumble? Even after—the commotion at the house?"

"You can't see their house from mine," said Miss Trumble. "It's round the bend of the lake, between me and the harbor." That was what was so wonderful, she said, the remoteness—and yet less than half a mile from the dear little shops.

"Where can she have concealed herself?" interrupted the Inspector. Miss Trumble was known to rabbit on more than somewhat in her works about the marvels of St. Martha's Island.

"No one ever discovered. And yet we all know one another in our tiny community, any stranger stands out a mile. We don't encourage strangers, Inspector. We are content among ourselves, all so loving, so generous, so—carefree." Miss Trumble had taken the invitation to a booze-up quite literally and now took a decidedly carefree draught of her vodka tonic. "My sweet house, down by the water's edge, not another building in sight. The mornings dew-pearled—for all the world, I wouldn't miss a single one of those awakenings to a summer morn—"

"And you live there all the year round?" said Cockie, interrupting again. And yet, thought the Duchess, should he not be just a trifle more attentive? Somewhere under all this guff, she had a feeling that Miss Trumble was testing him, daring him. Her own police had failed in the investigation. Even after all these years, she did not want a mainland policeman to do better.

"All the year round—except for my roamings." Maud Trumble was noted for an almost obsessive research into the more exotic regions of the world for "color" for her highly exotic novels. She expatiated upon the roamings with a wealth of detail which soon had the Inspector longing for a return to the Duchess's verbal hedgehoppings, then she said, "But—back to St. Martha's! Summer tourists, you will exclaim—the girl was lost among a clamor of summer

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tourists. But, no—there is a tiny hotel catering only for regulars. Occasionally a house let to carefully 'vetted tenants.'" Nor was camping permitted. "We want no weekend fornication in our beautiful woodlands."

"Goodness!" said the Duchess. Maud Trumble's works were full of practically nothing else *but* (though her tents were pitched mostly in far Tibet or on the sands of Araby). "And no signs of her having slept out-of-doors or of course you'd have told us."

"Of course," said Miss Trumble heartily.

So—back to the two sisters. "Visitors for some years, always took the same house, quite accepted by us all. The General and Mrs. Cray—her sister seldom came in those days, she was in America. She was only a girl when Mrs. Cray was married and came over from finishing school in Switzerland for the wedding and within a week or so was off to the United States. Some quite prestigious jobs there, and then when war broke out she got herself sent home and had a post in the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square. Stuck it out when the bombing came, but Mrs. Cray—she was always high-strung and nervous. They'd decided to buy the house, anyway, and retire to the island when the General left the Army, so she settled down and made a home for him there till the time came."

"And the sister?"

"Bombed out in 'forty-three or whenever it was. V.1., you know—the doodle bugs, we used to call them," Miss Trumble said with the easy familiarity of one who, safe on her island, had never seen a bomb fall in her life. "They released her from her job and she salvaged what she could and came and settled down with her sister. And the General came home at last and there they all were, such a happy threeshome. Threesome," corrected Miss Trumble, slightly taken aback.

All the same, mildly squiffy she might be, but Miss Trumble was playing a game with them. It was like a detective story, thought the Duchess, where the clues are placed not so much squarely before the reader as slightly obliquely, so that they come out as not quite what in fact they are. She suggested: "Mrs. Cray had no children? Was she very much devoted to her husband?"

"Doted," said Miss Trumble.

"And the sister?"

"Doted. We all doted on him. He was so handsome, so charming."

"She didn't perhaps dote just a smidgeon too much?"

"Rubbish. She had a young man of her own in America. He couldn't

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get married because his wife was crippled or something and he couldn't ask for a divorce. She didn't talk much about it. Mrs. Cray, of course, didn't approve. But, anyway, he was killed in the war—sent over with the American Army to the Middle East and his ship sank off Salerno."

"And the General?"

"He had a staff job in Cairo the last two or three years, then he was invalided out because of his heart. Three years later, they came back from shopping and found him lying back in the old rocking chair. He mumbled out a few words, "Happiest hours—Honeysuckle Rose." The place was called Honeysuckle House, and of course her name was Rosemary. But it was strange," said Miss Trumble, "that he should die in that old rocking chair."

"Why strange?"

"It was a double rocking chair, an interesting old Victorian piece. A bit battered, you know, but he loved it—never would let anyone sit in it. It was tucked away in a corner. They kept it in their shrine. Mrs. Cray built a sort of shrine around his memory, right there in the sitting room: the rocking chair with a piece of ribbon tied across it like they do in museums, and his uniform, medals, cap, gloves, riding boots, old photographs—"

"I *see*," said Inspector Cockrill.

"You see what?" said Miss Trumble rather sharply.

"Where the weapon came from. —His old Army automatic, which, by the way, he should have handed in. But—loaded?"

"Two women in that lonely house in the woods—that's why he kept it there in the first place."

"Not sharing your faith in the island community?" said the Duchess, a mite nastily. "But the girl doesn't sound like a—like a marauder." It had seemed only civil to join her guest in the booze-up and marauder seemed suddenly rather a tricky old word to say. "They hadn't been expecting her?"

"No—it was midmorning and they were still in their negligees. They'd never have been if they'd been expecting a visitor. They were terribly proper. Shall I be a little generous," said Miss Trumble, "and tell you something I know now that the police never knew? The ladies had never in their lives set eyes on the young woman."

It was certainly all very odd. Mr. Cockrill got up and went over to the window, staring down unseeingly at the huge stretch of parkland beneath the Castle, the broad terraces, the high-walled gardens

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with their orderly rows of vegetables and flowers. "Were there no papers? Didn't she carry a handbag?"

"A plastic thing. Nothing in it but paper tissues, a little money, very ordinary cosmetics. All very neatly stowed into their compartments," said Miss Trumble, again in that oddly challenging way.

The Inspector was silent.

"Miss Trumble," said the Duchess, "I take it that you now know who she was? When they died—did you know then?"

"Assolutely not," said Miss Trumble. She made a visible effort to pull herself together. "Absolutely not."

"I mean—you weren't harboring her, were you? You were all so free on the island and generous—"

"I never set eyes on the girl in my life," said Miss Trumble. "Never spoke two words to her in my life."

Very odd. All very, very odd. Two harmless women known to everybody and a stranger known to nobody. The bodies had been discovered, Miss Trumble revealed, in the late afternoon. By the time the mainland experts arrived, what havoc might not have been wrought by the tiny and inexperienced police force that so blameless an island would warrant? No prints on the gun, no indication of the order in which the three women had died. There were suggestions that they had sat down in conversation for at least a little while—Mrs. Cray's chair hitched a little closer to the central chair so that her "good ear" might be toward the visitor, Miss Twining's spectacles on a table close to hand. Why Miss Trumble should suddenly burst into slightly tipsy giggles was perhaps explained by her sudden recollection that when they first met the three ladies appeared to have been wearing gloves. Red, white, and blue gloves. "Not Union Jack gloves, nothing so loyal as that—blue gloves on one and white gloves on another and red gloves—"

"Red, white, and blue? Oh, my goodness," said the Duchess, blinded by a sudden revelation, "that does explain a lot."

If Inspector Cockrill was similarly comforted, he did not betray it. "What about the ladies' wills?"

"A few small bequests. All the rest for the benefit of the island. Nothing interesting there."

Impasse. The Inspector turned back from the window. "Miss Trumble, why should you have come to the Duchess with this problem? Why to *her?*"

"I explained that to her. I had to come to London, so I thought I'd

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just run down and see her. The young woman was in some remote way related to her."

"Everyone is in some way related to me," said the Duchess. "With so old and fecund a family, if that's the right word, they more or less have to be." It was like Adam and Eve, she added vaguely.

"But how did Miss Trumble know about it?"

"If anyone is related to a Duchess," said Miss Trumble somewhat scathingly, "pretty soon *everyone* knows it. They show off about it."

"I never can think why," said the Duchess. "I don't think *I* do, and I *am* one."

"A question hangs over it all," said Miss Trumble, "and I don't think I should die without someone knowing at least as much as I do. So—just go on guessing," she invited the Inspector.

Chief Inspector Cockrill did not entirely care for the word guessing, but was obliged to guess, anyway. "It can only have been a case of blackmail. And, considering the three scarab pendants, something to do with the General."

"The General's life in Cairo was an open book," said Miss Trumble. "A man devoted to his wife. I've seen his letters home—she would proudly show them round. So caring, longing only to be back on the island, with his love forever and ever to his Honeysuckle Rose. Yet happy enough in Cairo. He made friends there with a British couple with a charming small girl."

If not the General, then one or the other of the sisters? But upon whom she had doted, as Miss Trumble would have said, to the end of his life and after. And inquiries appeared to have elicited not a breath of scandal against the sister, pursuing her prestigious jobs in America and at the outbreak of the war very properly dashing home to offer her non-combatant services to King and country.

Or the girl had done the shooting? The gun, being kept as a means of defense as well as a relic, would have been readily to hand. But the girl had been eleven or twelve when the General had known her in Cairo. True, little pitchers had long ears, but, again, those letters had sounded very genuine.

"Why *now?*" said the Inspector. "Why didn't you tell the police then what you knew? Or at least contact her relatives?"

"I knew nothing about her relatives. If she'd been in Egypt, she wasn't there now—and no one ever came forward. As for the police, you yourself now know as much as the police ever discovered. And you seem no nearer to suggesting a solution. The red, white, and blue gloves, for instance—what do you make of that?"

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The Duchess opened her mouth to reply, but Cockie was already saying calmly: "Well, when you so subtly led us into believing that this all happened in the summer, you were deceiving us. The sisters were doing their housework when the girl arrived—red rubber gloves for washing up, white cotton for dusting. That leaves the girl with blue ones—and she wasn't wearing dainty net gloves for a walk through the woods along the lake, she was wearing woollen blue ones to keep her hands warm, wasn't she? And if it *was* winter, there need be no mystery about her coming to the island undetected. At half past five in the evening, it would be dark. She simply stepped off the ferry and, carrying her light case—or even just a rucksack—walked off along the path."

"Less than half a mile to your house, Miss Trumble," said the Duchess reproachfully.

"I tell you, I never set eyes—"

"You were off on your roamings—otherwise, you must have. You told us you never missed a summer's day on your island—those dawn awakenings. She was there in the winter."

"Are you suggesting," said Miss Trumble stiffly, "that she broke into my empty house?"

"No, of course not," said the Duchess. "You'd told her she could use it—you'd told her the way to it along the path, and where she'd find the key. She wrote to you, I suppose—one of your innumerable fans—and the letter reached you, forwarded on, when you were just about to set off for Peru or wherever it was."

"Outer Mongolia," said Miss Trumble haughtily. Peru, indeed! Why not Grand Central Station and be done with it? "I do not journey to ordinary places."

"And you dashed off this kind note to her. She was an aspiring writer, perhaps, and you thought she should have a chance to work without having to worry about rent and things. Her letter would show that she was an acceptable sort of person, she could quote my name as an earnest of respectability—though when I think of some of my ancestors," said the Duchess, "that's really a bit of a joke. And she'd refer to the island and mention having known General Cray when she was a child, and heard all about it. So—"

"Do you suppose that after the killings every house on the island wasn't thoroughly searched?"

"You kept a tiny bit emphasizing how neat she was," said her Grace. "You were needling Inspector Cockrill, to see whether or not he'd get the significance. The significance was that she kept your

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house like a new pin." She looked encouragingly at Mr. Cockrill and he did not fail her.

"She'd stack away her bit of luggage wherever you kept yours—all sorts of cases for your different travels. She used a sleeping-bag, probably, to save laundry problems and so on, and that also would be rolled away with the rest. Her few clothes were very ordinary, you said. Hung up at the end of one of your closets, they'd excite no attention. She'd automatically wash up and put away what little crockery she used. Probably you'd told her to help herself from your deep freeze till she got around to some shopping."

"Had I also invited her to use my credit cards?" said Miss Trumble acidly. "None were found, nor any checkbook."

"Do you think a girl as hard up as that would have a bank account?" suggested her Grace. "Thousands don't. She'd have hoarded up her pennies and the police wouldn't think anything of a few five-pound notes stashed away somewhere. You wouldn't need British currency where you were going, and you had complete faith in the islanders. Like the key, you'd have just tucked it into some hiding place near the front door and told her where she'd find it. She wouldn't risk carrying it around in the plastic handbag—if she lost it, she couldn't get another. Oh, and of course, like a good girl, she'd cover up your typewriter when she wasn't using it and any bits of work she'd done would be taken as something of yours."

Miss Trumble looked not overpleased at the idea of amateur efforts being mistaken for her own, but only asked coldly: "And all this I kept to myself when the news broke?"

"But it never did break, did it?" said the Inspector. "Not in Outer Mongolia. And by the time you got home, except on the island, the furor would have died down. You'd heard nothing of it by the time you got back to your house."

"There was a note there from the police," said Miss Trumble. "In case I got back and found signs of their intrusion. They told me briefly what had happened—ten weeks ago by that time—but said there was no sign of any intruder."

"And of course no lights would have been seen," said Cockie. "Your house wasn't in view of any other. But didn't they check for the girl's fingerprints at your place?"

"They were perfectly satisfied that no one had been there." Miss Trumble shrugged. "I told you I had a low opinion of the mainland police."

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The Duchess did not remark that the island police would probably have done the house-combing. She said only, "So you kept quiet?"

"Well, yes. I had time to think it all out before I needed to reveal that I was back at home. After all, it didn't really matter where the girl had stayed."

"It might to the police," said the Inspector.

She looked at him shrewdly. "What are you hinting at?" and added suddenly: "All this has been told to you quite privately. You *will* respect my confidence?"

"So far, Miss Trumble," said Cockrill rather grimly, "I think we have in fact had very little of your confidence."

"I'd have told it all to the Duchess, but she suddenly rushed me off to this wretched bazaar of hers. You were brought in and it has amused me to challenge you. So I ask you again—what are you hinting at?"

"It might *not* matter to the police where the girl had stayed," said Inspector Cockrill. "But it mattered very much to you, Miss Trumble, didn't it? This precious island, no one admitted who wasn't approved and accepted all round, and you, without a word of warning, introduced a stranger of whom you knew nothing—who, in the event, proved to have been in all likelihood a blackmailer and who certainly brought about the dreadful deaths of two much-loved members of your little community."

Miss Trumble's face had gone a rather pasty white beneath its customary crocodile tan. "I recognized at once what I had done. But her letter had been forwarded to me at Ulan Bator, my last outpost before I set off on my trip. I was distraught with preparations and on an impulse I just dashed off a note to her." She asked rather pathetically: "Do you really think she had it all planned? A blackmailer for sordid money?"

"Perhaps not that," said the Duchess kindly. "It could have been something much more innocent."

"Such as—for acceptance?" said the Inspector. "She goes to the house, she draws attention to the scarab pendant she's wearing, identical with their own. She says that the donor had told her that if she ever needed to, she should bring it to Honeysuckle House on the island of St. Martha and show it as proof of identity to—"

"To her mother," said Miss Trumble.

To her mother! "Oh, Miss Trumble!" said the Duchess, reproachfully again, "you told us that neither of the sisters had ever even seen the girl."

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"Well, when babies are to be adopted," said Miss Trumble, "they are often taken away at birth so that the mother need feel less pang in parting with them. And a sister of Mrs. Cray would certainly have been obliged to part with an illegitimate child. Remember, this was many years ago—things were not nearly so easy as they are these days. And Mrs. Cray was so rigidly pious and upright—to the end, I think Rosalie was a little in awe of her."

"But would she have been so obsessed with her sister's morality as to snatch up the gun?"

"She was a little deaf," said the Duchess. "If she misheard, if she got things wrong, if she thought that the General—"

"The love of her life!" cried Miss Trumble, inspired. "Faithless! That highly strung creature, all her aggressions crushed down by the long years of self-enforced discipline! Who knows what nameless suspicions might not have been harbored all this time in that secret heart?"

The great novelist was clearly getting into her stride, not unassisted by vodka. "The beloved husband—false! The sister a traitor to their lifelong devotion! The storm blows up, overwhelms her at last. The gun is to hand—she seizes it up and in one mad moment blots out all the pain."

"A moment's reflection might have saved them all a lot of trouble," said Cockie discouragingly. "The General had known her sister only for a few days—at the time of his own marriage. He then saw her rarely on her holidays home from the States. But to be the age she was at the time of the killings, the girl must have been conceived long before that."

"Before she even left Switzerland?" said the Duchess. "Hence the hurried departure to America, where she would be unrecognized. A Swiss lover—"

"What would a nice pacifist Swiss be doing in Cairo during the war?" said Cockie. "Surely it is much more likely—"

"The American boy friend!" said her Grace. "He couldn't get a divorce because the poor crippled wife went on not dying. So the child was adopted. Then came the war and Miss Twining went home, and the lover was eventually packed off with the U.S. Army to the Middle East, and later to Italy, where he died. But meanwhile, she had written to him to try to get in touch with the adoptive parents, now in Cairo, and send her news of the child. Perhaps she told him about the scarab pendants. Perhaps it was even she who'd arranged that if her daughter ever wanted to find her—"

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"So, Miss Trumble, you see," said the Inspector with none of his habitual acerbity, "if the deaf woman gets things wrong, becomes hysterical, and starts shooting a gun, that's really no fault of yours."

"It was my fault that she ever went there," said Miss Trumble. "And wherever the wrong may have lain, it was through her going there that it was exposed. I knew as much as you do now: I should have worked out the truth, as you've done—I shouldn't have let her go. And before I die, I wanted to get it off my conscience, or at least not have it all hoarded up within me. I could hardly have told anyone on the island. But the Duchess—I've heard about your Grace. You have a reputation for being clever about this kind of thing, about elucidating things, and for being kind. It's true that I've been playing games with the Inspector, challenging him. But to you I'd have told it all, simply and outright. It would have been like going to confession."

"*Absolvo te*," said the Duchess, in the words of the absolution, and like a priest in the confessional sketching the sign of the cross in the air. "Dear Miss Trumble—there is nothing to be forgiven. There was no blackmail, no relationships, no nothing: we've just been working through the possibilities—perhaps trying to prove to you that our police aren't quite so dumb, after all. But there's no reality in any of it. It's much, much more simple than that—isn't it, Cockie?"

"You did a kind and generous thing, Miss Trumble," said the Inspector. "You did no wrong at all."

"In fact, nobody in all this business has done anything wrong," said the Duchess. "Unless you could count that poor woman, not responsible for what she was doing—"

"No court would have condemned her," said Inspector Cockrill. "While the balance of her mind was disturbed—that's the official phrase."

"The girl dropped in at the house," said the Duchess, "with only the kindest intentions. She happened by chance to be on the island, and she wanted to tell the General's widow how, as a little girl, she had known him in Cairo, and how often he had talked to her about his home and his love and longing to be back there. And she caught sight of the double rocking chair, perhaps, and said how often he'd described it to her, that battered old Victorian relic, and how the happiest hours of his life had been spent in that old chair, gently rocking to and fro with his arms about his one true love—"

"And the poor wife leapt to her feet," said Cockie, "and cried out, 'But it's *her* chair! I never in my life sat rocking in that chair with

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him.' The chair, bomb-battered, that her sister had salvaged from those days when she—and he—had been alone together in London. The chair he'd crawled to die in as a last message to the true love of his life—mumbling out his dying words to *her*."

"No wonder you laughed, Miss Trumble," said the Duchess, "when you told us that Miss Twining wore spectacles and Mrs. Cray was rather hard of hearing. It was like my two Peggys, wasn't it—Peggy-with-the-glasses-on, as they call her in the village, and Peggy-a-bit-deaf? He must have known it from the moment he set eyes on the little sister come over to London for the wedding. It was like our dear chauffeur Bill—he was marrying the wrong girl."

"And you tell me that there was no wrong in that?" said Miss Trumble.

"They couldn't help falling in love—and it really was love if it lasted all those years, spent mostly apart. For the rest, he kept to his promise—he went through with the marriage. She went abroad, they kept out of temptation's way. When they were thrown together by the war, they two in London and the wife safely tucked away on the island—well, if at the end they could say that their happiest hours had been spent in a rocking chair, I think that that was most honorably sticking at least to the letter of fidelity. The only small deception was in those letters—over the head of their recipient sending all his true love to his Honeysuckle Rose. Well, her name was Rose, too, wasn't it? Rosalie."

"But all this the poor wife couldn't know," said the Inspector. "And Miss Trumble has most graphically described what could have been the state of her mind. The gun was there and she just simply picked it up. Many, many murders have arisen in the same sort of way."

He stood and cast about for his disreputable old straw hat and, holding it across his chest, made a not ungraceful obeisance to his late enemy. "I agree with her Grace, Miss Trumble. You did only what was generous and kind and there's no need to blame yourself at all." To his hostess he said: "Don't bother to ring. I can find my own way to the portcullis."

"Fool!" said the Duchess, and went out with him at least to the head of the stairway. "Poor old trout—but I suppose she'll get over it."

"One way or another," said the Chief Inspector, "I daresay she will."

Miss Trumble hadn't taken too long. She was standing at the little side table when the Duchess returned, pouring out for herself a

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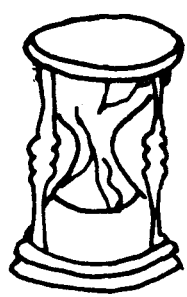
sufficiently reviving vodka tonic. "My *dear!*" she said. "I've got it all worked out already! I'll have to fiddle the scene, of course, and disguise the characters. I thought perhaps Pocahontas: that would please my dear American public. Marries the man Rolfe, you know, but has never got over her passion for John Smith, or whatever his name was, that she rescued from whoever it was. I can look all that up—"

"She being twelve years old at the time?" murmured the Duchess.

But the great author swept on. "And there in the noble hall of her home stands the splendid gilt couch that had seen the consummation of their love—"

"But it was a rocking chair," protested her Grace, "and the whole point is that *nothing* happened there."

"Oh, I don't think my readers would like that at *all*," said Miss Trumble.



DETECTIVERSE

NOT EVEN DEATH DID THEM PART

by PEARL LIEBMAN LASKOWITZ

Here lies Ebenezer Biff—
Not a nice man to know.
He threw his wife over a cliff,
Too bad she wouldn't let go.

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a *NEW* Rosso Pallone story by

TERRY MULLINS

As Rosso was cleaning his pistol, one of the black cadets came over. "You Rosso Pallone?"

"Yes. You're Luther Cross, aren't you?"

"That's right. You got a sister named Rosetta?"

"Yes. Why?"

"A friend of mine knows Marvin Ramsay, one of the two blacks in your sister's class. Marvin's taking your sister to the junior prom and my friend hears there may be trouble about it."

All of this was news to Rosso, who had been absorbed in Police Academy affairs recently. "Tell me about it," he said . . .

RACIAL INCIDENT

by TERRY MULLINS

Rosso Pallone held his revolver steady, pointed at the still figure before him. He squeezed the trigger and fired. Again. And again for all six rounds. He looked at the results. All six shots were within the outline and two of them were in a vital area. For someone who had never fired a revolver before entering the academy two weeks ago, that wasn't bad. There were several in his class who did much better and a lot who did somewhat worse.

The Police Academy was different from any school Rosso had attended. He hadn't done well in high school—largely because he did little reading and wasn't interested in literature or history. He owned no books and ignored the magazines and newspapers the rest of his family devoured. When he read at all, it was for facts. Once he got the facts he wanted, he stopped reading. His teachers said he had no intellectual curiosity.

That didn't seem to matter here. Take law, for example. It was

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not presented as an abstract idea, but as a set of rules and regulations. He could understand that. It didn't matter what the ancient Romans thought or did—the law was meant for people in Philadelphia and they obeyed it or were arrested. He was becoming part of the law-enforcement process.

As he was cleaning his pistol, one of the black cadets came over. "You Rosso Pallone?"

"Yes. You're Luther Cross, aren't you?"

"That's right. You got a sister named Rosetta?"

"Yes. Why?"

"A friend of mine knows Marvin Ramsay, one of the two blacks in your sister's class. Marvin's taking your sister to the junior prom and my friend hears there may be trouble about it."

All of this was news to Rosso, who had been absorbed in Police Academy affairs recently. "Tell me about it," he said.

"There's not much I know. There are no black girls in the junior class in that parochial high school, so the two black boys are taking white girls to the prom and your sister is one of them. My friend says there's going to be trouble. He's going to take a couple of carloads of brothers over there to protect the blacks."

"That could lead to violence."

"They know. They're ready for it."

When he got home, Rosso waited until Rosetta was by herself and asked her about the prom.

"You mean you haven't heard us shouting and hollering this past week?" she asked.

"Sure, I heard you, but you and Mama are always shouting at each other."

"But Papa's been in it, too."

"That's not new, either. And when he starts quarreling in Italian, I tune out. I didn't know you'd been going with Marvin."

"I haven't. There are more girls than boys in the junior class. It's a small school—not like Roman. And you know that dumb rule about only members of the junior class attending the prom. It got you your only date with Lucy Carl. So I have to go with a boy in the junior class and Marvin has to go with a girl in the junior class, or we don't go. He'd rather take a black girl and I'd rather take one of the seniors, but what can we do? He's a nice guy and my only chance to go to the prom. He's even a Catholic. The way Papa talks, you'd think he was a Black Muslim."

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Rosso could imagine it. "I hear there may be trouble at the prom," he said.

"I know. That's Marco Cagli's doing. He's trying to get some of the senior boys stirred up against the blacks."

"I think I'd better talk with him."

"I wish you would. I wish someone would."

Rosso didn't waste any time. The next day he dropped in at the Chevron station where Marco worked after school. He came quickly to the point. "Look here, Marco, I hear you're making waves about the junior prom."

"Cut the Marco. I'm Mark and you're Ross, okay?"

"Okay—Mark. About the prom—"

"I've been talking with some of the seniors. We don't like blacks dating our girls and we're going to do something about it. Indy says you've got to stop that sort of thing at the beginning, before it gets out of hand."

"Indy? Who's he?"

"He's a guy who comes in here to have his cars serviced. Two or three times a week he comes in for a tuneup and a lube job. He stands around and talks while I work. He's a smart guy."

"Why does he come in so often?"

"He repairs cars. When he gets them fixed, he brings them in here for tuneup, oil, grease, and fill up with gas."

The next day, Rosso asked Luther if they could talk with his friend who was rounding up the blacks. Luther said he'd arrange it. The friend's name was Hank Phillips. Rosso asked Luther, "Did someone tell you you should do something to protect the blacks?"

"Sure," Luther said. "Buddy Tucker said the brothers better be on hand to keep the blacks from being hurt. He knows a couple of martial-arts guys who could help, too."

"I'll bet he does."

After that talk, Rosso stopped in to see Detective Furr. "I've looked up Indy and Tucker," he said. "There's nothing on Tucker, and the only thing on Indy is a hit-and-run charge with speeding and failure to have his car registration with him. It seems he made a right turn on a red light and hit a flower van going through on the green. Knocked a fender off the van and kept going. The van driver radioed in to the florist, giving the car's description and license number. They called the police and we caught Indy ten minutes later. He paid the florist and settled the whole thing out of court."

"Including the speeding and registration violation?"

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"He paid a fine," Rosso said.

"So what's the problem?"

"Here are two outsiders trying to stir up a racial incident. Why? What would it do?"

Furr's eyes narrowed. "I see your point," he said. "A race riot at the school would pull all the patrol cars from South Philly—probably some from City Hall as well. It would disrupt the whole pattern of our surveillance. Let's see what would be going on that night."

For a Friday night, it was a fairly light schedule. A Jewish rally for Israel in the Northeast, a Hispanic Arts exhibit in Kensington, a band concert at Veteran's Stadium, and a Town Watch meeting in Roxboro were the major events. None of them required any heavy police protection.

"The most likely to be affected would be the concert at Vet Stadium," Furr said. "It's not your average rock concert. It's a high-priced yuppie event. It probably won't be sold out, but it will make a lot more than most that are. There would be a lot of money in the stadium, but not much cash take—they sell most of their tickets in advance."

"Thanks, Mr. Furr. I want to see that none of the high-school kids gets hurt. My sister would be in danger if any fighting broke out."

"Actually, Ross, you may be onto something. The fact that Indy didn't have a car registration and the fact that he repairs automobiles and has several serviced each week sounds suspicious. When you add that to a parking lot full of expensive cars, it bears looking into."

The next day, Rosso talked with the four black cadets and asked their help. One didn't like the idea, but Luther and two others agreed. They met with Hank Phillips and the six blacks he was planning to lead to the school. "I want you to work with us if you really want to protect the black students," Rosso said. "Luther, Jonas, Fred, and I will be there in uniform. I'm fairly sure that someone is trying to stir up a racial incident. They want to use you and a group of high-school students to cause serious trouble. If you and the seniors will work with us, we can prevent that. Both sides have been offered outside help. We want you to say no to that. That help is where the real danger comes from. Tell them you can handle it by yourselves. Tell all outsiders to keep out. Then be on hand early the night of the prom—we'll have a plan worked out to protect everyone."

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There were a lot of questions and Rosso let Luther and Jonas answer them. Phillips and his friends gradually lost their suspicion and wound up eager to help.

As the meeting broke up, Rosso said to Luther, "I think it will work. Thanks. I couldn't have done it without you."

"You better believe it," Luther replied.

Mark Cagli and the boys of the senior class were angry at the thought that they'd been set up by Indy. They wanted to confront him. It took a while to make them see the point of waiting until after the prom.

"It wasn't just Indy," Rosso pointed out. "We've got to let whoever is behind all this think you're going through with the demonstration, otherwise they'll try something else, something we're not prepared for. The important thing is that no students get hurt."

They finally agreed to cooperate and keep outsiders out of it.

Rosso developed a simple plan. They'd aim to get the students into the gym as fast as possible. Mark and the seniors would make sure no outsiders got into the school. They'd spread the word if any showed up on the streets. Cars were the big danger. Troublemakers could arrive in a hurry. With neighborhood cooperation, they planned to keep cars out.

An hour before the prom, Rosso went over the plan for the last time. "We have three streets feeding the school, all one-way streets. We block them all off one block from the school. We put watchers with walkie-talkies near the barricades but out of sight. That way we get word if anyone tries to get through the barricades. Okay so far?"

"Okay."

"Then we have bags of sand to put across the three streets coming toward the school and a plank full of nails ready for each street going away. We want to stop cars from coming in if we can and we want to be able to catch them if they do get in and leave, but we don't want to trap anyone right at the school. We'll have two guys at each pile of bags and one guy working each plank of nails. All of you keep out of sight. When you finish your job, go to cover at once. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Good. I'll be in a second-floor classroom where I can see the street in front of the school and one of the side streets. I have a bullhorn. If I call out for the streets to be cleared, Luther, Jonas, and Fred

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will get all the kids into the school or under cover quickly. I'll have an open line to police headquarters. I hope we won't need all of this, but I'm afraid we will, so let's be clear about what to do."

The truck with the bags of sand arrived and everyone helped unload it. The band, a group of five seniors from the nearby public school, arrived and made its way into the gym to set up. Two teaching nuns arrived and made their way to the principal's office. Luther took his post in front of the school. Jonas and Fred stationed themselves at the corners. The athletic director and two male teachers stopped to talk with Luther. They nodded and went into the gym. And the first pairs of students showed up.

Rosso went to his second-floor classroom, opened the window, and looked out. Then he checked his walkie-talkie setup. All three watcher groups were ready. As more and more students filled the streets and sidewalks, he opened his line to police headquarters.

Although the prom was scheduled to start at nine o'clock, the students had been told to come at least twenty minutes early. Most of them did. That was fortunate, because the trouble call came at 8:45. A red Pontiac with three occupants had stopped at the barricade coming in from Broad Street. Two males got out and removed the barricade.

Rosso leaned out the window and called over his bullhorn, "Clear the streets! Car coming from Broad!"

Students began running into the school. Those too far away were sent to cover by the officers. A house across the street opened the front door and let in five couples. Rosso alerted headquarters to stand by. Two guys threw bags of sand across the street from where the car was coming. Everyone was out of sight by the time Rosso got the second call from the watchers. "The red Pontiac is on its way and traveling fast. There's a woman driving and two men in the back seat."

Rosso could see the headlights—and heard the sudden squeal as the driver hit the brakes on seeing the bags of sand in the street. Two men got out and headed for them. Each had a gun in his right hand. They began pulling the bags aside with their left hands. Rosso fed the facts into the walkie-talkie.

"Car eighteen is on its way from Broad and Snyder," the operator reported.

With the bags cleared, the men returned to the Pontiac and it sped into the street before the school. Shouting obscenities to a

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deserted neighborhood, the three stopped the car and got out, each armed and angry. Rosso used the bullhorn. "Put down your guns! This is the police! You're surrounded!" His words echoed in the empty schoolyard.

The would-be troublemakers jumped back into the car. One leaned out the back window and fired five shots at the school. Rosso heard glass shatter in a window below him. Then the car roared away. It hit the plank of nails and all four tires blew.

The car hardly slowed. Rosso could see rubber flying in all directions. Then it was riding on the rims, sending sparks along the street. From Broad, Rosso saw the police car bearing down. He called for all the nail planks to be cleared out of the streets. The patrol car passed the school and quickly closed on the Pontiac. Both turned the corner and were lost to Rosso's view.

He waited until the police operator told him that the fugitives had been caught, then he gave the all clear. The students came out of houses and alleys and from behind cars and hurried into the gym. The prom began.

The three other police cars never arrived. They were sent to the Veteran's Stadium concert where a gang of auto thieves had been trapped.

Rosso heard about it at the academy the next day from the instructor. He said, "We had four cars cruising around outside the parking lot, a team on top of the stadium surveying the lot for trouble, the usual officers in the usual places, and one team in an unmarked car in the middle of the lot.

"The team on top of the Vet saw a large paratransit van pull up at the edge of the lot. Eight men got out and started into the lot. The team on the stadium reported and asked for reinforcements.

"The gang worked in pairs and broke into an Audi, two BMWs, and a Cadillac. They were into the cars before we could get to them. One of them even got his car started, but we captured all of them. Indy and Tucker were among those arrested. They both clammed up, but some of the others told us where the gang operates and how it works. This was a big catch."

Then the instructor introduced a retired captain who talked about life on the force in the Sixties. "All of you are proud of your uniforms," he said, "and most of you find people showing you respect, but that wasn't always the case. I have some scenes here—put the lights out, please—taken of the burning of Watts, Detroit, and New-

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ark. The sound isn't too good, but if you listen carefully you can hear the things the crowds were saying. While it wasn't this bad in Philadelphia, it was bad enough. For a period of at least three years, I never walked on the campus of Penn or Temple without having students call me 'pig.' As you'll see from these pictures, whole neighborhoods attacked the police—and firefighters, too."

In the dark, Rosso looked at Luther, who simply grinned and said, "Wasn't nobody calling us pigs last night, was they?"

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a *NEW* Scott Jordan story by

HAROLD Q. MASUR

Harold Q. Masur was a practicing counsel before entering the U.S. Air Force and still does some legal work, although he devotes most of his time to writing. His last three books are The Attorney *(published by Random House, Bantam, and the Playboy Book Club, and acquired by Universal Pictures),* The Broker *(St. Martin's), and* The Mourning After *(St. Martin's), a novel about art fraud adapted from an EQMM short story. He is a past president of and currently counsel to the Mystery Writers of America.*

Nicoletti rubbed the side of his jaw, feigning puzzlement. "On direct examination by Mr. Jordan, oddly enough, but quite understandable, no mention was made of any insurance policy. Nevertheless, such a policy exists, does it not?"

"It does," Kate Miller said.

"A life-insurance policy payable on the death of your husband?"

"Yes."

"In what amount?"

"One hundred thousand dollars."

Nicoletti pursed his lips in a silent whistle. "Oh, my! And who, pray, is the beneficiary on that policy . . .?"

THE OPINION

by HAROLD Q. MASUR

"Now let's get this straight," Nicoletti said. "You had the gun in your hand?"

"Yes."

"And you shot him."

Kate Miller nodded.

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"Speak up, please. So the jurors can hear you."

"Yes, I shot him."

"Where?"

"In the bedroom."

"I mean, where did the bullet enter his body?"

"I wasn't aiming anywhere in particular. My hand was shaking. I closed my eyes and pulled the trigger."

"Nevertheless, the bullet entered your husband's chest and penetrated the heart. That is an uncontestable fact, is it not?"

"I don't know."

"Well, now, Mrs. Miller, you were sitting right there at the defense table next to Mr. Jordan, your attorney, when the Medical Examiner testified. You were listening, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Samuel Wallace, an internationally renowned pathologist, stated that your projectile tore through the victim's left ventricle and—"

"Objection," I snapped. "Repetitious and inflammatory. The jury has heard all this more than once. They've seen the state's exhibits, charts, and illustrations. Where is the prosecutor taking us by rehashing all this material over and over again?"

"Mr. Nicoletti?" Judge Wanamann said.

The Chief Assistant D.A.'s voice was caustic. "If counsel for the defense would just be patient, this line of questioning should soon become obvious, although I suspect he is aware of my purpose even now."

The judge nodded. "Overruled. Proceed."

Nicoletti showed me his square white teeth in one of his Teddy Roosevelt grins and turned back to my client. "That first shot, Mrs. Miller. A perfect bull's-eye. Right through the heart. Pure luck, was it?"

Kate turned away from her tormentor and looked pleadingly at me. I had debated internally long and hard about subjecting her to cross-examination, especially by Nicoletti, who was one of the best litigators the state had employed in years. But I wanted to let the jurors see this woman, to hear her talk, to judge her character, to understand how cruelly she'd been treated over the years by a brutal alcoholic. I wanted them to see the gap in her mouth where the man's fist had bludgeoned out a front tooth shortly before she'd pulled the trigger.

Now Nicoletti, unrelenting in exploiting the opportunity I'd given

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him, said sarcastically, "I understand, Mrs. Miller. You prefer not to answer my last question. Then let's move on. You claim you shot your husband in self-defense, isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"You did not intend to kill him?"

"Of course not."

He picked up the state's exhibit. "This is a .38 caliber Smith & Wesson, a handgun with considerable stopping power. Your husband was a big man, was he not?"

"Yes."

"About six-two?"

"Yes."

"Weighing over two hundred pounds?"

"Two hundred and twenty-two."

"Well, now, that makes him a very large target. And he was standing fairly close to you?"

"Close enough to kick me. You saw pictures of the bruises, Mr. Nicoletti."

"What I am trying to understand, Mrs. Miller, is why you failed to aim at some less vulnerable area. Your husband's shoulder, his thigh, his stomach—anywhere but his heart."

"I didn't have time to think. I was terrified, trying to protect myself. I just closed my eyes and fired."

"Closed your eyes?"

"Yes."

"And then fired a second shot?"

"I have a vague memory of pulling the trigger again."

"Eyes still closed?"

"Yes."

"According to the autopsy, the second bullet entered your husband's temple over the left eye. As lethal and mortal a wound as the first. No Olympic marksman, eyes open, aiming carefully, could have been more accurate." Nicoletti cocked an index finger. "Bang! Bang! One bull's-eye after another."

"Your Honor," I snapped, "the prosecutor—"

The judge's gavel stopped me. "Yes. Highly improper, Mr. Nicoletti. Kindly restrain yourself."

"I was carried away, your Honor. I apologize." Nicoletti turned back to the witness. "This gun you took from your husband's drawer, was it loaded?"

"It must have been."

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"Diamonds, rubies, gold bars, anything like that in the apartment that needed protection?"

"Hardly." She smiled ruefully.

"Did your husband have enemies? Had he received any threats?"

"He never said."

Nicoletti rubbed the side of his jaw, feigning puzzlement. "On direct examination by Mr. Jordan, oddly enough, but quite understandable, no mention was made of any insurance policy. Nevertheless, such a policy exists, does it not?"

"It does."

"A life-insurance policy payable on the death of your husband?"

"Yes."

"In what amount?"

"One hundred thousand dollars."

Nicoletti pursed his lips in a silent whistle. "Oh, my! And who, pray, is the beneficiary on that policy?"

"I am."

"I take it this policy was still in force when the lights suddenly went out for Mr. Miller?"

"I beg your pardon."

"When your husband died."

"Yes. The policy was in force."

"Would you identify the beneficiary on that policy?"

"I am the beneficiary."

Nicoletti's gaze swept the jury box. "From personal experience, Mrs. Miller, I know that premiums have to be paid in order to keep a policy alive. Tell us, please, who's been paying the premiums on your husband's policy?"

"I have."

"So that under normal circumstances, when your husband died you would receive the company's check for one hundred thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Has the company honored its obligation?"

"There has been some delay."

"Can you tell us why?"

"Objection," I snapped. "The company's actions are irrelevant to the charges in this case."

"If it please court," Nicoletti said, "my question goes directly to motive. Consequently, the state is entitled to some degree of latitude."

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Wanamann nodded. "The witness may answer."

Kate was frowning. "I'm not sure I can answer, Mr. Nicoletti. There are complicated rules and I'm not a lawyer."

"I didn't ask you what you were, Mrs. Miller. I will leave that judgment to this jury. The rules are not in the least complicated. They quite simply state that a felon may not profit from the fruits of her crime."

That tore it. I erupted, livid with anger. "Move to strike, your Honor! Time and again the prosecutor has violated long-established precepts. He characterizes this witness as a felon. Inexcusable. Flagrantly prejudicial. There has been no such adjudication. This trial is still in progress. Doesn't Mr. Nicoletti believe in the presumption of innocence?"

"Motion granted," Wanamann said mildly. "The remark will be stricken from the record. The jurors are directed to disregard the prosecutor's last statement."

As if they could. Like trying to erase indelible ink from porous paper with one's knuckle.

Nicoletti, satisfied, dismissed Kate with a disdainful gesture. "I have no further questions for this witness."

"Redirect, Mr. Jordan?"

"Oh, yes, your Honor." I rose quickly and approached Kate. "This life-insurance policy which so intrigues the District Attorney, Mrs. Miller—who originally bought the policy?"

"Ben. My husband."

"When did he buy it?"

"Several weeks after we were married."

"Did he pay any of the premiums?"

"The first one."

"And after that?"

"I took over all the rest."

"Why?"

"Because Ben lost his job."

"Under what circumstances?"

Nicoletti started to object, but the judge stopped him. "No, Mr. Nicoletti, you were emphatic in making the point that Mrs. Miller kept the policy alive by paying the premiums out of her own earnings. You opened the door. The jury is now entitled to a full explanation. Counsel may proceed."

"Why did your husband lose his job, Mrs. Miller?"

"He'd been drinking at work," Kate said. "One of the inspectors

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caught him sleeping behind a crate. When he awakened Ben and told him to go home, my husband struck the man. He was fired without any recommendation."

"When did that happen?"

"About five months after we were married."

"Had he worked at all since then?"

"Infrequently, and then only for a few days at a time."

"Same problem?"

"Yes—drinking and fighting."

"So you were, in fact, sole support of the family, paying household expenses?"

"We had no other income."

"Is that why you also paid the insurance premiums?"

"Yes."

"So that you could have the same measure of security as most wives?"

"Yes."

"You testified on direct that you are a substitute teacher at a private school. Is it a full-time job?"

"No. They call me when they need me."

"The school had not called you on that fatal day?"

"No."

"So you were at home when he appeared that afternoon. Two o'clock, was it?"

"About then."

"Unusual, was it not, for him to appear at that hour?"

"Yes. He generally returned after dark."

"Was there anything different about his appearance?"

"He had a black eye and some bruises. When the police finally came, they thought at first that I was responsible."

I observed several jurors shaking their heads in disbelief. Could the cops really be so dense? Kate had half her husband's bulk and little more than half his weight. Without a gun, she was a mouse cornered by a dinosaur.

"Proceed."

"As soon as I saw Ben, I knew he'd been in another fight. I went to the kitchen to fix an ice pack for his eye. He followed me, cursing the bartender who'd refused to give him any more credit. He told me he'd climbed over the bar and tackled the man and it took half the customers to pull him off."

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"It must've been quite a donnybrook. The police checked it out?" I knew they had. And would call in witnesses if it came to that.

"Yes."

"After you tended to his eye, he put the bite on you for more money?"

"Yes. I told him I needed it to pay the rent."

"A man like that, more than half bombed, he didn't much like your answer, did he?"

"He went berserk. I'd never seen him like that. He knocked me down." She put her fingers to the gap in her mouth reflexively. "I was terrified. I crawled into the bedroom. I knew where he kept his gun. He came after me and laughed when he saw the gun. That's when he kicked me. I said, 'Please, Ben, don't, I can't take any more.' But he pulled his foot back again—and I fired."

"With your eyes closed?"

"Yes." She looked up, chin high, voice fiercely earnest. "I swore to tell the truth, Mr. Jordan. That's exactly what happened."

"You opened your eyes when you heard your husband fall to the floor?"

She shook her head. "I didn't hear him fall. My ears were still ringing. But I did open my eyes and saw him lying there."

"What happened then?"

Memory drained blood from her face. "I was shocked, hysterical. I ran to a neighbor's apartment and told him to call 911 for an ambulance."

"911 is the police emergency number."

"Yes."

"Why didn't you use your own telephone?"

"Because it wasn't working. Ben had torn it loose the day before when he heard me talking to my sister in California. He said long-distance calls were too expensive."

"This neighbor—is he the same man who called the police on several occasions when your husband was beating you?"

"Armand Quinn, yes."

"Mr. Quinn is not in court to testify at this trial. Can you tell us why?"

"He's a very old man, ninety-one, and he's now in the hospital with a broken hip."

"Then I take it he never tried to interfere with your husband physically."

"At his age? Armand is not suicidal."

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There was a brief ripple of laughter.

"During all these years of abuse, you personally never called the police or complained to anyone?"

She hugged herself as if suddenly chilled. "No. I was afraid Ben would make life even more miserable for me."

"Now tell us, please, how your husband acquired his gun?"

"He used to be a security guard and he kept the gun after he was dismissed from his last job."

"Have you, Mrs. Miller, ever had any previous experience with firearms?"

"No. I hated the very idea of having one in the apartment."

"And you never fired a handgun before that afternoon?"

"Never."

"Nor any kind of weapon?"

"No."

"Or visited a shooting gallery for a little target practice?"

"Never."

"And you cannot account in any way for the fact that those two shots were so lethally accurate?"

She made a futile gesture and shook her head.

"Let the record show a negative response." I turned back to the defense table and said to Nicoletti, "Your witness."

"No questions."

Judge Wanamann said, "The defendant may step down. Call your next witness, Mr. Jordan."

"Police Officer Francis X. Grady."

A uniformed cop in his early thirties, rangy and durable, with cropped red hair, knobbed wrists, and big freckled hands, took the oath and sat, visored cap perched on one knee. He looked at me expectantly.

"Your police car patrols the area in which the defendant resides?"

"Yes, sir. Chelsea."

"Do you remember any radio calls asking you to respond to a disturbance at 740 West 22nd Street, Apartment 7A?"

He had his notebook open. "We had a number of such calls to that address over the past few years. I remember most of them."

"Do you remember the first call?"

"That one especially. October 16, 1985. My partner, Pete Brower, was driving. We were only three blocks away when we got the squeal. The door to 3A was propped open by a wheelchair with an old gent in it. He pointed and said, 'Miller's knocking hell out of her again.

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Watch yourself, fellas. He's bombed.' We could hear some cursing and thumping and a woman crying. So I banged on the door and yelled, 'Open up! Police!' He jerked the door open, this gorilla, skunk drunk. No talk, no warning, and he sandbagged me."

Because I was sure the jurors understood the colloquialisms, I didn't try to harness him. "Badly injured, were you?"

"They had to wire my jaw for a couple of weeks."

"Ancient history," Nicoletti objected. "No connection with the specific charge in this case."

"Your Honor," I said, "the specific charge here is the commission of a capital crime. Our plea is self-defense. The character, the temperament, the violence of the deceased is critically vital to that defense."

"Yes," Wanamann said. "Proceed, counselor."

"What happened after Mr. Miller attacked you, Officer Grady?"

"My partner tried to cuff him. But Miller got him in a bear hug and I saw Brower's face begin to turn blue. So I got up and used my nightstick on Miller." Grady shook his head at the memory. "We put the cuffs on and hustled him down to the car. His wife was in pretty bad shape, so we took her to Manhattan General and hauled him over to the precinct. Charged him with assaulting an officer and resisting arrest. He got thirty days on Riker's Island that time. Shoulda got life in a straightjacket."

"Please," Wanamann said. "No editorial comments, officer. Strike that last remark."

"No other charges filed at that time?" I asked.

"The lady refused to sign a complaint. There's not much we can do about that."

"This Armand Quinn, the neighbor. Is he the same individual who called the police on subsequent occasions?"

"He is."

"On any of those occasions, did Mrs. Miller ever sign a complaint?"

"Not to my knowledge."

I turned away. "You may inquire," I said to Nicoletti.

"No questions."

"Call Dr. Irving Maxwell."

Maxwell, a young and dapper physician, carried himself with an air of annoyance at being called away from what he plainly considered more important matters. He took the oath, got settled, brushed back a few strands of thinning hair, adjusted shell-rimmed glasses,

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and started to recite his medical degrees. Nicoletti cut him short by conceding his qualifications.

"Dr. Maxwell," I said. "You are presently a resident on the staff of Manhattan General, are you not?"

"I am."

"How long have you been on the staff?"

"Since I completed my internship there four years ago."

"Were you on duty the evening of January 16, 1986, when Mrs. Katherine Miller was brought to the Emergency Room?"

"I was."

"And you're here in court today with hospital records pursuant to a subpoena?"

"I didn't volunteer, if that's what you mean."

"That's what I mean, doctor. Please describe Mrs. Miller's condition at that time."

"In addition to various bruises and contusions on and about the face, she had suffered a fracture of the radius, one of the bones in her left forearm. A simple fracture that needed to be immobilized."

"A diagnosis made from X-rays taken at that time?"

"Yes."

"You have those X-rays in court?"

"Yes."

I had them submitted and marked in evidence. "Did you question her about the injuries?"

"She said they were the result of an accident and refused to elaborate. The police had already informed us it was a case of wife-battering."

"Did you keep her in the hospital overnight?"

"She insisted on going home. We put her arm in a cast, cleaned and dressed the bruises, and offered to contact appropriate agencies for help. She declined and told us it wasn't necessary."

"Thank you, doctor." I invited Nicoletti to cross-examine.

The prosecutor regarded Maxwell with an astute eye. "Enlighten me, doctor. Do you know of your own knowledge the immediate and proximate cause of that fracture?"

Maxwell frowned. "I don't understand the question."

"There's an implication here, doctor, that the husband deliberately broke Mrs. Miller's arm. You don't know that as a positive fact, do you?"

"No. I wasn't there when it happened."

"Isn't it possible, then, that the fracture was caused by a fall?"

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"Yes, it's possible."

"And isn't it a fact that close to one hundred percent of all bone fractures are the result of falls?"

"I would say so, yes."

"No further questions."

I was on my feet before Nicoletti reached his chair. "This particular fracture was a fresh break, wasn't it, doctor?"

"No doubt about that."

"So it must have happened shortly before she was brought to the Emergency Room?"

"I would say so."

"And there is no doubt about the fact that Mrs. Miller had recently suffered a very severe beating, is there?"

"No, sir."

"Wouldn't you say that any one of those bruises on her face was powerful enough to knock her down?"

"Objection," Nicoletti said. "Counsel is asking for a conclusion, not a fact."

"Your Honor, opinions and conclusions from expert witnesses are admissible, as Mr. Nicoletti well knows. He himself conceded the credentials of this witness."

The judge nodded. "You may answer."

Maxwell smiled. "I'm an amateur boxer. I can assure the court that any one of those blows would have sent me to the canvas."

Grateful for the unexpected gratuity, I said, "Thank you, doctor," and returned to the defense table.

Nicoletti waived recross. It was almost over.

I stood. "The defense rests, your Honor."

Wanamann consulted the clock. "Court will recess for fifteen minutes. We will convene for closing arguments, after which I will charge the jury."

"By God, counselor," Nicoletti said, "you were never better." He had just joined me at a corner table in Cooper's Tavern, an oasis patronized by judges, lawyers, and bail bondsmen because of its proximity to the courthouse, where we were relentless adversaries. Outside the courtroom, we were friends. We had locked horns on many previous cases, with the score between us close to even.

"What are you drinking?" he asked.

"Chivas," I said. "Twelve years old."

"Defense attorneys can afford that stuff, not civil servants."

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I signaled the waiter. "Try some on me. Did you like my closing argument?"

"Yes, indeed. Flowery, but effective. Touched the heart." Mimicking my voice, he said, " 'The prosecutor would have you believe that money was the motive in this case. Remember, please, millions of life-insurance policies name wives as beneficiaries. Are we to conclude, then, that all these good women harbor some dark longing to keep up payment because they wish to liquidate their husbands?

" 'The state produced not one scintilla of evidence to show that Mrs. Miller ever considered killing her husband before that afternoon. So where is the premeditation? He comes home in a towering rage, frustrated and embittered because he can no longer indulge his addiction without cash. And when his wife is reluctant to donate the rent money to subsidize his appetites, he launches a merciless attack on the defenseless woman. Ladies and gentlemen, there comes a time when human endurance is depleted. It happened that afternoon.' "

I shook my head. "You have an astonishing memory, Giovanni."

"Please—it's John now. Even if my old man still uses my baptismal moniker. About my memory, any trial lawyer worth the name ought to have near-total recall." He sipped the scotch the waiter had delivered. "Very nice. How come all this sudden generosity, counselor?"

"You earned it."

"How?"

"By helping my case."

"How did I do that?"

"You goofed. Most uncharacteristically."

"Me? Goofed?"

"Yep. I never thought I'd see the day."

"Tell me about it. When?"

"In your cross-examination of my client."

"You mean that woebegone creature tyrannized by a drunken bully? You think *I* treated her too harshly?"

"Totally insensitive, harsh, corrosive, contemptuous."

"Tactics resented by the jury, you think? Creating even more sympathy for the lady?"

"It looked that way to me."

"Thereby weakening the state's case?"

"Do you doubt it?"

He just sat there, saying nothing, with a kind of Mona Lisa smile, almost beatific. The smile struck a spark and I stared at him. Ni-

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coletti wasn't hatched yesterday. He hadn't goofed. He knew exactly what he was doing. I said in a hushed voice, "You don't want a conviction. You deliberately sabotaged your own case."

He hoisted his drink and knocked it down, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "No comment."

"None needed. You once told me about a favorite aunt of yours—a battered wife with a nasty lush of a husband, how you used to fantasize about letting him have a taste of his own medicine but there was nothing you could do at the time because you were still a kid."

Nicoletti sat back, his alert eyes watching me.

"You didn't want to litigate this case, but you had no choice. The chief insisted. Convictions look good on the record, especially with an election coming up, so he assigned his top talent. You knew Mrs. Miller had a fair chance at an acquittal. You didn't want to jeopardize that chance, so ostensibly you mounted one hell of a fight—at the same time helping the defense."

"You're saying it, not me."

"Ah, Giovanni," I said softly, "you're quite a man."

"That's what my wife says."

He was suddenly alert, staring over my shoulder. I turned and saw one of his trial assistants beckoning urgently. Nicoletti pushed his chair back. "Saddle up, counselor. The jury's coming down. Looks like we've got a verdict."

Kate stood at my side, facing the jury. She was paper-white, her lips parched. The bailiff took a slip of paper from the foreman and handed it to the judge. Wanamann glanced at it, expressionless. "The clerk will read the verdict," he said.

Kate started to tremble and I clamped a steadying hand around her elbow. The court clerk adjusted his glasses and read.

"Not guilty."

Pandemonium. The female contingent erupted into cheers. Male spectators clapped each other on the back. Kate's face burrowed against my chest. I couldn't tell whether she was sobbing or laughing or both.

The jury was polled. The verdict held. I shouldered Kate past the press corps clamoring for a comment and got her into a cab. She didn't speak until we reached her apartment. I got out and held the door for her.

"About your fee—" she said.

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"Not now, Kate. Money wasn't the reason I took your case. There were expenses, of course, and we can take those out of the insurance money when it comes."

"The insurance company," she said with a touch of bitterness. "They were eager for a conviction, weren't they?"

I shrugged. "A conviction would have taken them off the hook. Well, they didn't get it. The state says you're innocent. I'll notify the company tomorrow and remind them to send you a check. Look, I have to get back to my office. It's all over. Everything's going to work out fine."

I got my first smile since the case began—a bright, incandescent smile that illuminated her face.

Trial work demands total concentration, which means neglecting other matters. So I put Kate Miller on the back burner and spent the next few weeks catching up. Toward the end of the month, signing expense vouchers, I thought of her again, and dialed her number.

"Not working today, Kate?"

"Tomorrow," she said. "Someone just resigned and they've offered me a permanent position. How are you?"

"Fine. Did you get your check from Empire Life?"

"Yes. One hundred thousand dollars, plus interest from the day Ben died."

"You're entitled. I'll be sending you a bill for a modest fee and expenses—"

She interrupted. "I didn't deposit the check. I sent it back."

I frowned. "Say again."

"I rejected the check and returned it."

I looked at the telephone handset. It seemed intact. My hearing was reliable. I said, "Now wait a minute. Let me get this straight. Are you saying you rejected the insurance money?"

"Not the insurance money. Just this particular check."

"I'm confused, Kate. Why?"

"Because the policy has a double-indemnity clause. They're supposed to pay double the face amount if Ben's death was the result of an accident. I want them to honor the terms of their policy." She paused. "Are you still there?"

"I'm here, Kate. I'm not sure you're all there. Have you heard from the company since you returned the check?"

"This morning. The man who phoned was quite rude. As a matter of fact, I was just about to call you."

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"Rude? How?"

"His exact words?"

"Please."

"He said, 'I don't want to pop your balloon, lady, but whatever you're smoking get rid of it. An accident? Ha! No way! You want to sue, be my guest.' And he hung up."

I was half inclined to agree with the chap. "You said you were about to call me."

"Yes. I want you to bring an action against the company."

"I'm not sure you have a case."

"Listen to me, please. I've been thinking about this all morning. Even if the decision goes against us, they still have to pay the original amount. So what have I got to lose? I know you like a challenge. I also know it means a lot of extra work, and I'm willing to make a deal. If you get the company to pay that extra hundred thousand, half of it is yours."

"Half? Fifty thousand?"

"Yes. In full payment of all legal fees and expenses."

It *was* the challenge that got me. "You're sure?" I said.

"Absolutely. I'll put it in writing."

"Let me think about it, Kate."

"Go ahead and think. I'll hold on."

I laughed. "Okay. We've got a deal."

"I'll leave the policy with your receptionist this afternoon. Please have an agreement ready for me to sign."

We lost.

Knocked out of the box in the lower court. No double indemnity. In for a penny, in for a pound, I reached the decision to appeal after a long night's deliberation and reflecting on Kate's woeful face.

So here I was, voice growing hoarse, arguing up a storm in the Appellate Division. The presiding justice, a shaggy, white-haired St. Bernard of a man, sat on the dais, flanked by his associates, all in flowing black robes, listening attentively.

Behind me sat the respondent's lawyer, general counsel to Empire Life and Casualty, with three assistants and a file that weighed almost as much as all four of them. The presiding justice caught my eye and pointed to the clock. My allotted time was running out and I started to close.

"Empire Life," I said, "was founded more than half a century ago. With long experience and the advice of preeminent counsel, the

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wording of their policies has been pruned, honed, and edited to mean exactly what they say—no more, no less.

"The company is now attempting to interpret their own words beyond any known linguistic boundaries. The contract states unequivocally that the respondent will pay double the face amount if the insured's death is the result of an accident.

"That word, 'accident,' is the core, the very essence of our argument. The company cannot define it to accommodate their objective, to mean what they would conveniently like it to mean. Neither can this appellant. Nor, with all respect, can the justices of this court. We must defer to the lexicographers. To the ultimate authority, *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*."

I glanced at my notes, saying, "Quote, from the Merriam edition, 'Accident: An event that takes place without one's foresight or expectation.' *Webster's New World* describes an accident as something that occurs outside the normal course of events, usually resulting in an injury.

"Your Honors, on the record, the insured had abused his wife on at least thirty different occasions. On every occasion, she was meek and abjectly submissive. Never, not once in all that time, a period of over three years, had she ever fought back, shown any resistance, or complained to the authorities.

"So the insured, lulled into a sense of invulnerable safety, launched his final attack. But this time the dam broke and his victim pulled a trigger. For the husband, a totally unexpected event. Unexpected also by the insured and by the beneficiary. Beyond the normal course of events? Indisputably. Did the insured suffer an injury?" I gestured expressively. "The justices will agree that I need not expand on that aspect."

The presiding justice tried to suppress a slight quirk of amusement. His colleagues were less successful.

I continued.

"There was, of course, a trial vigorously prosecuted, and the appellant was adjudged not guilty of any crime. I submit that by any reasonable interpretation of this insurance contract, death was indeed the result of an accident. May I thank the justices for their patience."

Counsel for Empire Life rose to address the court, feigning incredulity at what he had just heard. I had studied his appeals brief and I knew their position, so I sat back, eyelids at half mast, and ignored his polemics . . .

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Early spring. Each morning, day after day, I watched the *Law Journal* for the court's decision. And finally, on a blustery Wednesday in April, it appeared. I scanned it quickly, then read it slowly, and felt the smile spreading broadly across my face. The presiding justice himself had written the opinion, incorporating most of my arguments, with somewhat more restraint and considerably more elegance.

I waited for Kate to arrive home that evening, then dialed her number. "Any news?" she asked.

"You're rich, Kate."

Silence for a moment. Instead of a jubilant reaction, her voice was sober. "We won?"

"Yes."

"Will they take it any higher?"

"It's hard to say, but I think not. All the justices concurred. It's a unanimous decision and sets a precedent the company may find hard to swallow. But it's a problem they may never encounter again."

"When can we expect a check?"

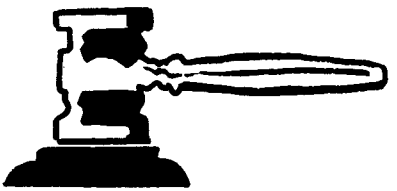
"Soon, I hope. I'll call their lawyers tomorrow morning."

She took a deep breath. "I'll never be able to thank you."

"Not necessary," I told her. "Let me explain the procedure. The check will be made out to both of us. I'll need your endorsement before depositing it into my escrow account. After it clears, I'll issue my own check for your share, one hundred and fifty thousand. Invest it wisely."

"I may need your advice," she said.

"I'll be available, Kate."



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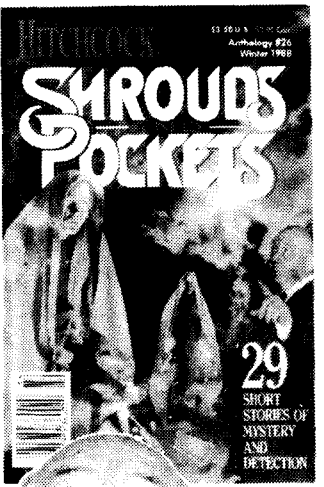

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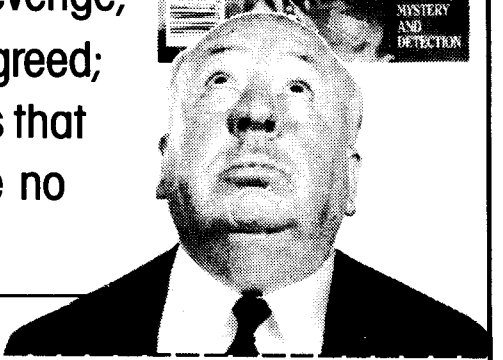
thrilling stories expose the desire for revenge, jealousy, and greed; and remind us that shrouds have no pockets



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Cloris sat on the bed and carefully pulled open the drawer of the nightstand. The revolver was an ugly weapon, dark-blue with pearlized plastic grips. She didn't want to touch it but knew she had to if she was to ascertain its caliber.

Steve Nelson was born in Kansas but has spent most of his thirty-four years (at this writing) in Colorado. He took his degree in English at Colorado College, where he met his wife Georgeanne, who is also a fiction writer. He works now at the University of Denver library. "Over the years," he says, "I have written fifty or so short stories, the first half of ten novels, both halves of one novel, and a children's book. These manuscripts comprise a fire hazard sufficient to warrant attempts to sell them and get them out of the house."

Here's to the hope and hard work that develop talent, and to a bright future for this obviously talented and hard-working writer . . .

ANOTHER DAY AT HOME

by STEVE NELSON

Cloris was in the kitchen, fixing her husband Marlin's breakfast and listening to the early-morning news on the local radio station. It wasn't a very good station, but it was the only one the town had and Cloris listened to it mostly out of a sense of loyalty. Also, nice bits of town gossip sometimes seeped into the newscasts. Right now, for instance, the young newscaster was telling Cloris that forty-two-year-old Dwight Blunt had died, apparently early yesterday afternoon, as a result of being shot once in the back with a bullet from a .38 Special. The body had been discovered in Blunt's apartment yesterday evening, by his landlady. Police were investigating but so far had made no arrests. Cloris hastily switched off the radio

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as she heard Marlin's footsteps coming downstairs from their bedroom. She would have to think about Dwight Blunt later.

"Mornin', Ma," Marlin said as he came into the kitchen, his nostrils flaring slightly at the smell of his breakfast. He kissed Cloris vaguely, sat down at the kitchen table, and began polishing his knife and fork on his napkin. Cloris turned her back to him and sneered in the general direction of the coffeemaker. She hated when he called her Ma. They didn't even have any kids. And in fifty years of marriage she had never grown to accept Marlin's habit of polishing his silverware before he ate. Not just in restaurants, but in other people's houses, and even in his own home.

"I guess I'll be moseyin' into town this morning," Marlin said around a mouthful of half masticated eggs.

"Do you have the list I gave you?" Cloris asked. She hated when he used the word "moseying." He watched too many westerns on TV. These days he was always moseyin' off somewhere. Moseyin' off to the kitchen to get some "grub," moseyin' off to bed to get some "shuteye." Cloris didn't like this flavor of the old West invading her home and she came very close to telling him so.

"I've got the list right here," Marlin said, poking a confident finger at his shirt pocket. "Sure you won't come along for the ride?" he asked.

"The house is a mess."

Marlin shrugged. "Okay. I guess I'll go by myself."

"Don't forget anything on that list. I don't want you to have to drive all the way back to town to pick up something you forgot the first time. Something we need. You forgot oven cleaner last time." Cloris knew he'd forget something. He always did.

Marlin stood up, patted his pockets to make sure he had his car keys and his wallet. "Guess I'll be moseyin'," he said. "I'll try to be back afore sundown." He kissed his wife goodbye, put on the straw hat Cloris hated, and left the house.

Cloris heard the car start up and leave. It should take him half an hour to drive to town, an hour to do the shopping, and half an hour to drive home. That made two hours. If he wasn't back within two hours, she'd know something was going on.

Cloris decided that as soon as she finished washing the breakfast dishes she'd go upstairs and check to see if the revolver in the drawer of the nightstand in their bedroom was a .38 Special. She was almost sure it was. It made sense. It made sense that Marlin had driven into town yesterday and shot poor Dwight Blunt in a fever of pas-

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sionate jealousy. After all, Mr. Blunt had quite a reputation for preferring married women to single ones. And Cloris had just finished taking a ceramics class from the man, with the object of eventually replacing the broken pieces of her Fiesta ware with her own carefully matched creations. And she had definitely tried to make Marlin jealous by throwing out hints that she and Mr. Blunt were having a torrid May-December romance. She had described Mr. Blunt in glowing terms. She had faked two phone conversations with her supposed lover, whispering and giggling a great deal when she knew Marlin was within earshot. And finally she had secretly ripped apart the seams of a lacy slip she sometimes wore, hoping Marlin would discover the damage and credit it to the impetuous hands of Dwight Blunt.

And now Marlin's gone and shot the poor man, Cloris said to herself, having finished the dishes and climbed the stairs to their bedroom. She sat on the bed and carefully pulled open the drawer of the nightstand. The revolver was an ugly weapon, dark-blue with pearlized plastic grips. She didn't want to touch it but knew she had to if she was to ascertain its caliber. Cloris had developed a fear of guns at an early age, thanks to her Uncle Herbert. Uncle Herbert had one day fired a load of number-six shot through the radiator of a country school bus because, as he later explained to the authorities, he was tired of shooting pheasants.

Cloris felt suddenly faint and opened the bedroom window a foot or so before sitting back down on the bed and taking the gun from the drawer with both hands. She thought she'd have to unload it to see what sort of ammunition it used, but she didn't know how. She started fiddling with it, at first gingerly and then somewhat impatiently. The gun suddenly jumped out of her hands and onto the floor. The air in the room seemed to have changed somewhat, and there was a ringing in Cloris's ears.

"I think I must have pulled the trigger," she said quietly, out loud. She noticed a hole about the size of her big toe in the screen of the open window and realized the bullet had gone harmlessly out into the back yard somewhere. She dropped the gun back into the drawer, closed the window, and went back downstairs to do some vacuuming. She'd have to tell Marlin to repair that hole in the screen—otherwise a lot of flies would come in. He'd say, "What hole? How'd that get there?" And she'd say, "Don't you remember? I told you to fix it months ago." That would stop his questions.

Cloris began vacuuming the drapes in the living room, using the

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long, snoutlike attachment that reminded her pleasantly of anteaters she'd seen at the St. Louis Zoo in 1927. She thought of poor Mr. Blunt, her slightly ridiculous ceramics instructor, with his curly red toupee and his habit of slapping his still flat, athletic stomach whenever he caught the eye of one of his younger female students. Now poor Mr. Blunt was lying on a cold marble slab in some morgue, waiting to be carved up. Cloris felt a momentary twinge of guilt. But the murder really wasn't her fault. She never would have tried to make Marlin jealous if he hadn't carried on that sordid affair with that frizzy-haired little flirt with the shoe-button eyes who worked at Woolworth's. Cloris had become aware of this liaison one day when she and Marlin had stopped by Woolworth's to get some grosgrain ribbon. Marlin and the shameless little clerk had exchanged a burning glance that didn't go unnoticed by Cloris. She was convinced this wasn't the first time in their fifty years of marriage that Marlin had gone astray. But she had caught him at it this time.

She had, of course, revealed to him that she knew all. But he had denied everything, and had even smirked at her in a self-satisfied way, as if he enjoyed her jealousy and liked being thought a faithless husband. His behavior had changed radically after she smeared some of her own lipstick, Coral Sunset, onto the collar of that ridiculous cowboy shirt he insisted on wearing.

"How do you explain *this*?" she'd asked him, showing him the collar. He had not smirked then. He had turned a bit pale, almost grey, but continued to deny having an affair with the Woolworth's clerk. And so Cloris had been forced to get even by pretending that she and Dwight Blunt were more than just student and teacher. And everything would have been fine if only Marlin hadn't brought that awful gun home.

Cloris finished vacuuming in the living room and went through the rest of the house, dusting and cleaning. She pinched off the dead leaves on her house plants and put a couple of aspirin in the water of the vase of cut roses on the dining-room table to make them last longer.

She was busily polishing the mahogany buffet in the dining room when the thought of the gun returned to her mind. If only she hadn't warned Marlin about burglars. She had told him months ago that burglars were something he ought to be concerning himself with. But he had just shrugged and done nothing, as usual. And so Cloris

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had been forced to crack the glass panel in the front door, from the outside, with a hoe handle so that Marlin would think someone had tried to break in. Marlin had then bought the gun, just in time to keep them from being murdered in their bed, and Cloris made him practice with it out in back of the house, using one long side of the barn for a target.

But now Cloris feared this weapon would be used on herself. What was one more murder for a man like Marlin? And out here in the country anything could happen and no one would be the wiser. Her husband could shoot her and feed her corpse to the chickens a little at a time and no one would even investigate her disappearance. Marlin would tell people she was visiting a fictitious sister in Chicago. He'd get off scot-free. It was time she faced the situation and took precautions, she thought.

She hunted up her sewing scissors and put them in the pocket of her apron. She wasn't bothered by the frailness of the weapon. She came from a family of fierce fighters. There was her Aunt Sonia, for example. A fearless traveler, she had journeyed all around the world with only a canary for a companion. On a train excursion across Russia, Aunt Sonia had been stranded in a train station near Tashkent for several hours and had successfully fought off the amatory advances of an Uzbec baggage handler with no more formidable a weapon than a nutmeg grater she happened to have in her purse. And Marlin was certainly no Uzbec.

Cloris wondered if there was any flypaper in the house. She would have to check in the cellar. Right now she was crouched on the kitchen counter, wiping down the freshly washed windows with crumpled sheets of newspaper so they wouldn't streak. She had heard of a woman who got rid of a dangerous husband by soaking arsenical flypaper in water and mixing the resulting juice with the doomed man's morning coffee. It had taken about a month. Cloris thought poisoned cream puffs would work better with Marlin. It would be quicker, and Marlin would be less apt to suspect. He was very fussy about his coffee.

She checked the time. If Marlin arrived on schedule he should be home in about fifteen minutes. She still had time to call the police. But then, that would hardly be wifely behavior, she thought. Much better to help him conceal his crime from the law. She wondered if maybe she could take a tiny rattailed file or something and use it to alter the riflings in the gun barrel so that it couldn't be traced as the murder weapon. Marlin would never think of that. He had

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apparently become a man of sudden action, heedless of his own safety. Cloris supposed that if she had to she would cover Marlin's crime by confessing to it herself. It might mean life imprisonment for her, but Marlin's happiness was more important to her than her own comfort or safety. He was, after all, her husband.

She was sitting quietly in the living room, sewing a button back onto his sweater, when Marlin arrived home. He left everything he had bought on the kitchen table and came in to say hello.

"The house looks shipshape," he said.

"I hope you got the right brands of things," Cloris said. Marlin looked a little startled.

"Why wouldn't I?" he asked.

Cloris handed him his reading glasses. "I found these in your sweater pocket."

Marlin smiled weakly. "I thought maybe I'd left them at the Kiwanis luncheon yesterday. Got to the store today, and no glasses. Had to get a clerk to help me."

"A female clerk?"

"No, no. I think I'll mosey on upstairs and get a little shuteye before supper. Okay?"

"Yes, why don't you?" said Cloris. "I'm sure you could use it. Your activities in town must have been tiring."

She listened to him climb the stairs and enter their bedroom. She had forgotten all about the Kiwanis Club lunch yesterday. At the time of Dwight Blunt's death, Marlin must have been miles away, surrounded by his ridiculous fellow Kiwanis. Marlin wasn't a murderer, after all. She felt a small twinge of something very like disappointment. Then she heard a faint squeak from the bedroom upstairs and smiled. Wasn't that the squeak of the nightstand drawer being opened? Was Marlin checking on the gun?

Of course. He must have heard in town that Dwight Blunt had been shot. And now he thought *she* might have murdered him. And when he checked the revolver, he'd see that one shell had been fired. Excellent. But he'd wonder how she had gotten to town yesterday. Of course he might remember the old bicycle out in the barn. She could have slipped out of the house as soon as Marlin was gone, pumped up the tires of the bicycle, and ridden the twenty-five miles or so to town. Then she could have hidden the bike in the bushes outside Mr. Blunt's apartment, crept into the building with the key he'd given her, and shot him between the shoulderblades, as he

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deserved, just as he was getting ready to leave for a sultry meeting with her rival. Then she could have pedaled back home, wheeled the bike into the barn, and let the air back out of the tires. She could have shaken some dust onto it from the dustmop she kept on the back porch so no one would be able to tell the bike had been ridden recently. Then of course she would have replaced the gun in the drawer upstairs.

Cloris smiled at the idea. She hoped Marlin was clever enough to figure things out for himself. Maybe she'd have to throw out a few hints. She had always regretted Marlin's lack of imagination.

DETECTIVERSE

A HAPPY ESTATE

by ANDREW J. BURTON

My first wife lies, as cold as stone,
Beneath the cellar floor.
My second's plastered in the wall
Beside the kitchen door.
There's two out in the garden
And one down by the lake,
While in the attic three more sleep,
But never will they wake.
And now the workmen come to call,
To make their hammers ring—
For if I am to wed again,
I'll have to add a wing.

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a *NEW* Baytown story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Flo had said some very bad things to Nate Megalo, Stewie told Norris. "I was there. Your sister gets drunker than a Welsh poet."

"She has a propensity."

"Once she got going, she wouldn't allow the man to escape."

"They should get married. Character assassination passes as nagging between a wife and husband."

"Your sister got real personal, if you know what I'm saying. None of us knew where to look . . ."

NORRIS FARMER'S SECRET

by WILLIAM BANKIER

With Stewie Brett's urgent telephone message in his shirt pocket, Farmer cranked up his television grin and faced the camera. But in the back of his mind was the question, Why has old Stewie surfaced? Maybe he's heard I'm writing a script about gamblers and wants me to cast him in a part.

The anchorman was saying, "And here with the latest on what's new on the Montreal film scene is our Channel Six entertainment authority, Norris Farmer. Norris?"

"Lots of action and excitement at the big movie houses this weekend," Farmer began, "headed by the arrival of *Ramshaft III* . . ."

Farmer wasn't exactly in the pocket of the film distributors. He praised their trashy movies because he was part of the media hype. If he were to say what he really thought, they would bounce him and get somebody else. The distributors didn't want him comparing their product with *Double Indemnity* or *Casablanca* and neither did the audience. They expected to be told they were going to see great

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entertainment, not half baked, second-rate films that were shallow, predictable, and forgettable.

"And there you have it," Farmer concluded his segment of the Six O'Clock News. "This is Norris Farmer reminding everybody—you oughtta be in pictures."

Stewie Brett's message said he'd be at The Hunter's Horn after eight o'clock. It gave Farmer time to go home and change out of the shirt and tie they made him wear on camera. He drove up and out of the underground parking at CBC and swung west on Dorchester Boulevard, making good time in rush-hour traffic as far as Mountain Street, where he had to creep the final quarter mile to his highrise. The doorman took the keys and the car while Farmer rode the elevator to sixteen.

The flat reminded him of Katie. She had taken her family artifacts when she left, along with a few of the better pieces from Ogilvy's and the Pine Shop in the Old Town. But it would always be the place she found and furnished when she came down from Baytown and they were married eleven years ago. As Farmer showered, he remembered hectic times.

She wanted to change him. Farmer resisted and there was a running battle Katie relished. He liked to sit in a chair and watch baseball, football, or hockey in their seasons. Once in a while he enjoyed going out by himself and drinking beer in a succession of bars and taverns. When he came home drunk, they fought about that. And there were times when he would be sad for at least a day, in the style of his late mother. This drove Katie wild—there was no reason for it and she wanted it stopped. Yet with all their conflicts, they spent a lot of prime time together.

Farmer found the dark-blue cashmere sweater he liked to pull on of an evening. The pale-grey cords gave just the right hug around hips and thighs. Stepping into oxblood loafers, he felt large and old-fashioned, ready for Peel Street and all the people. Funny thing about himself and Katie—they were better friends now that she was Katie Lebarron and living in Cote St. Luc. Her stockbroker had given her the size of home in which she would have loved to entrap Farmer, with a dozen repair jobs that needed doing every weekend.

It was a ten-minute casual walk to The Hunter's Horn, with time to stand outside The Ninety-Seven Club and listen to jazz blowing out of open windows. Farmer planned to use the converted bookshop as a location in his film. But he wasn't holding his breath. Even with the Film Development Corporation standing by with a grant,

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the main part of the financing depended on Nate Megalo coming through as promised. But Nate was a moody guy. Today he was flattering you to the sky, tomorrow he might want you in the ground.

The group at The Hunter's Horn sounded exactly like The Chieftains, provided you were holding a pint of draft Guinness. Farmer spotted Stewie Brett immediately. He was at the end of the bar nearest the dance floor, watching people in suits and dresses waltzing to "The Wild Colonial Boy."

"They don't care who they let in here now," Farmer said, crowding in at Brett's elbow. Stewie was missing a couple of recent baths.

Brett's disappointed eyes took in as much of Farmer as he could see. "Only girls wear sweaters without a shirt."

"Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"I've got a room in the Old Town. Upstairs over Megalo's Restaurant."

"I would have run into you."

"I've been in the States. Vegas. Atlantic City."

"How's your luck these days, Stewie?" For years, Brett had covered sports for CFCF, until he was implicated in a scandal involving a professional basketball team shaving points. Now he went wherever the odds were tough enough to keep him poor and ashamed.

"My luck is better than your sister's," Brett said. "Where can we talk?"

They left the club and walked across Peel Street to sit on a bench in Dominion Square. Farmer hadn't given Florence much thought lately. Once in a while he caught an episode of her sitcom on Channel 12. His sister looked beautiful in every shot, but the sits were unbelievable and the com was practically nonexistent. Reviewing her movie last year had been a tough assignment for him. It was a terrible film. The director had given Flo Farmer some ridiculous things to say and do. But there was no way Norris was going to hurt her feelings. He trumped up a rave and she was waiting on the telephone when he got off the air, laughing and crying.

Brett said, "Why is your sister such a jerk?"

"Start again," Farmer said. He had been protective of Flo for as long as he could remember. It wasn't just that she had pulled strings to get him his job on Channel 6. There was a day when he was fourteen and she was twelve that he had carried her home in his arms from the Baytown playgrounds. A pitched horseshoe had bounced and struck her on the head.

"Did you know she insulted Nate Megalo? In public?"

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"I know they see each other," Norris said. Flo had opened the door for Megalo to read her brother's script with a view to backing it. But what had begun as a good thriller was being corrupted by Megalo. He wanted his business rival, Lou Senzi, to be portrayed in the movie, thinly disguised. In rewrite after rewrite, Norris was focusing ever more sharply on the Senzi aspect. "If Flo and Nate have arguments, that's not unusual," he told Brett.

"She said very bad things to him." Stewie made a face. "I was there. Your sister gets drunker than a Welsh poet."

"She has a propensity."

"Once she got going, she wouldn't allow the man to escape."

"They should get married. Character assassination passes as nagging between a wife and husband."

"Your sister got real personal, if you know what I'm saying. None of us knew where to look."

Farmer began to focus on what his friend was telling him. "Nate must be steaming."

They watched some well dressed people get out of a limousine and walk inside the Windsor Hotel. At the end of the square, a derelict thrashed through a litter basket. Brett said quietly, "He wants her killed."

Norris was ashamed of his initial reaction. There goes my movie. Then he thought of tipsy, belligerent Flo. She wouldn't take anything from anybody. Ask her to apologize and she'd spit in your eye. That was assuming Megalo would accept an apology.

"Thanks for the warning, Stewie. What can we do?"

"Get her out of town."

Norris thought about it. He had some vacation time coming. "For how long?"

"As long as it takes Nate to cool off." Brett rubbed his face. "He may never forget. But it's your only shot."

Norris conned his sister by making up a story about the old man. Jimmy Farmer, nearly eighty years old, still lived in the house on Bridge Street with youngest son Michael, who was Baytown's leading insurance broker. Mike did it all. He chaired meetings of the Kiwanis Club, provided sweaters for a softball team, even ran commercials in prime time on CBAY. Norris the broadcaster and Florence the actress were small fish compared to Mike Farmer in the old hometown.

Flo remained suspicious during the trip. In the car, cruising along

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401, having passed Centralia and now only twenty miles from home, she said, "Why didn't Mike say anything to me about Dad?"

"It isn't life or death." Norris was feeling good, seeing the unchanged farmland, snake fences, hundreds of cows scattered over pastures on both sides of the road. "What's wrong with going home for a holiday?"

Flo didn't look away. She was reading his face. Farmer glanced over, caught a flash, saw her the way the film camera did. Her high forehead was framed with auburn hair, full lips set to one side in an expression that was not quite scornful. But the green eyes were what sold tickets. Here was the power, the intelligence. God help Flo's enemies, but a lover might be blessed.

"You set this up," she said.

"I'm doing us a favor."

"Who asked you?"

"Stewie Brett." He described the threat. "It's like a contract on your life. Megalo is that mad. But if you disappear for a while, it may be all right." She turned her attention back to the road. Farmer felt as if a lamp had been switched off.

They were only a few miles from home now. Then they were off the highway, driving more slowly along a commercial road. Flo said, "What about your script?"

"I presume the project is still on."

"Okay," she said. "I'll lie low for a while so as not to hurt your chances. I'll be at liberty in Baytown."

Farmer drove in past the North Station, past the canning factory, up the long hill which was forever in need of paving. Each familiar street was canopied with maples in leaf so thick the sunlight filtered through only in dappled patches. Frame houses, many of which he recalled like old friends, sat back behind trimmed lawns.

Michael's annual new car was parked in front of the house, wearing a protective cotton cover with his license number stenciled on it. The house was open front to back, like a tunnel. Norris and Flo walked in by the front doorway and straight on and out through the kitchen to the back lawn, where Mike and Jimmy were stretched in deck chairs under one of five giant poplars.

"You made good time," Michael said. His red hair was shades lighter than Flo's—he wore it short and combed it with a glossy tonic. His concession to garden informality was to have shed his pinstripe suitcoat and loosened the knot in his tie. Jimmy Farmer still had on his polished black boots, but his collarless shirt was fully

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open, revealing the rotund chest and diaphragm that powered his exceptional vocal cords. His bald head gleamed in the last of the sun and he held a glass of whiskey.

"We expected you to roll in after midnight," Michael went on. "Is Montreal on fire?" Alert eyes sought clues in the faces of the newcomers.

"No, but it's humid as hell," Flo said.

"Can't we grab a holiday on short notice?" Norris asked. He took his father's glass and raised it to his nostrils. "Strong stuff," he said, handing it back.

"Dad's problem," Michael said, "is they've bounced him from the choir. Younger voices have been given their freedom."

"I can still sing the lot of them out of the chancel." Jimmy turned his face to the spotlight of the declining sun, his eyes closed, teeth exposed behind smiling lips. "In the good old summertime," he sang in the bel canto style that had graced countless church services and club dinners around the county, "in the good old summertime, strolling through the shady lanes—"

They clapped at the end, a small outdoor concert in the dusky garden. Flo was seated on the grass by her father's chair. "Dad, the booze isn't good for you."

"I'm soon to be eighty." He showed her his benevolent frown. "I've been in training long enough."

They began the sequence of sweet events that makes up a Baytown holiday. They packed a hamper and drove in Michael's car to the sandbanks on Lake Ontario. In bare feet, trousers rolled knee high, Norris splashed through shallow water over corrugated sand. A cool breeze blew continuously off the lake. Jimmy tended the portable hibachi, turning the steaks with a professional twist. And he sang, of course he sang.

"All things come home at even tide,
Like birds that weary of their roaming,
And I would hasten to your side,
Homing."

Campers in the cabins behind a screen of dwarf pines lit their fires as darkness fell. The Farmer party stayed later than they'd planned. When they finally drove out along the rutted trail, headlights catching pairs of small eyes in roadside shrubbery, Flo said, "Mother would have loved this day."

"Her own fault for dying too soon," Jimmy said. They were a family who found it difficult to mourn.

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Two nights later, they went to the CNR Recreation Field, where the softball team Michael sponsored was playing against Paragon Cafe. There were the gold sweaters with the legend in red, *Farmer Insurance*, contrasting with their rivals in green and white. The pitching was high caliber. Double plays were frequent, some of the hitting was prodigious, and after every out the ball was peppered around the infield like popcorn in a pot.

In the middle of the second week, Norris took a night off to visit Harrington's by himself. Wearing jeans and a T-shirt, he hurried down Bridge Street hill, catching an internal echo of the excitement that used to fill him to overflowing in high-school days. That was when Harrington's was referred to as The Club and the twelfth-graders crowded the place after four o'clock. There was always a money game on the front table—pea-pool, with somebody shaking the leather bottle before tossing a numbered pellet across the table to each player. The number was your ball, only you knew which, and you made a dollar from any player whose ball you sank. With a buck from everybody when you potted your own. The sophisticated player wore his "pea" in his ear.

Norris pushed open the door with its tattered green blind. The long narrow room was populated by strangers except for one familiar figure at the front table. Bending over a cue, with five dollars riding on the shot, was the slicked-up but still disreputable figure of Stewie Brett. Norris went and sat on one of the platform chairs in his line of vision. The former sports announcer grinned as he took his stroke. The ball went in and his young opponent threw a five across the table. Stewie moved toward Norris, racking his cue on the way. Slipping onto the adjoining chair, he said, "I could make it in this town. Twenty dollars a week, easy."

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Killing time. I was in no hurry to look you up."

"What's going on?"

Brett found the Coke he had been drinking. He raised it and then set it down. "Let's go where we can get a beer," he said.

Norris led the way behind the post office, through the Market Square and across Front Street to the Coronet Hotel. They took a corner table in the men's beverage room, and when eight glasses of draft were in front of them they resumed their conversation. "Megalo," Brett said. "He called in my marker."

"What?"

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"I owe him. He's given me something he wants done."

The dirty feeling coming off Brett made Farmer want to leave the table, leave town. "What is it?"

"I can't do it, Norris."

"Is this about Flo?"

"He found out where she went. This thing has him really bummed out. He won't be satisfied until she's dead."

"Nate Megalo sent you here to kill my sister?"

"He doesn't know me. Nobody knows anybody. I go around Le Vieux Montreal like some tough dude. I throw money on the table when I have it. I don't say a hell of a lot. Megalo has this image of me in his head, but it's more him than me."

Hearing about it was dissipating Farmer's anger. His fear ebbed away. "So you can't fulfill the contract. What happens to you?"

"If I go back to Montreal? Megalo wastes *me*."

"Where else can you go?"

"It's a small world, Norris." Brett reached for glass three. "And I've been there."

They left the hotel by a back door and stood on a parapet looking down across the river. The night smelled of moist green air flowing up out of Prince Edward County. A car moved over the bridge, its headlights bouncing like a boat on choppy water. Farmer said at last, "We've got to figure out a way of getting you off the hook."

"Good luck."

"What are the options? Kill Megalo?"

"Brilliant. When and where and how do you intend to kill him?"

"I'm just getting the alternatives out of the way. Another is for me and Flo and you to leave the country, change our names."

"It's a small world," Brett repeated.

"So it has to be something else." They were standing beside a brick wall, dark and damp. Norris looked up to a window with a fluorescent light burning behind it. He slapped his hand against the wall. "I may have an idea."

"Let's hear it."

"Inside this building are the editorial offices of the local paper, *The Banner*. I went to school with a woman who used to work here. Hell, I married her."

Norris led Brett down an alleyway toward Front Street and the light. "Tomorrow morning I'll get her on the telephone. She may be willing to help us . . ."

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Katie Lebarron was happy to hear from her former husband. "Last time we spoke, you had a script in the works," she said into the phone.

"It could still happen." Farmer took a breath. "Katie, I'm calling from Baytown."

"I'm envious. We could be dancing at the Park Pavilion."

Norris decided to avoid memory lane. "It's about my sister. She's in trouble." He went over the problem with Megalo—Florence's destruction of the man in public and his determination to make her pay. "You can help us. But you'd have to keep quiet about it afterward."

Katie agreed to make a telephone call. The next day, Farmer delivered his copy to the editorial office. The doctored front page of *The Banner*, half a dozen copies, were ready for him the following afternoon. He picked up the package and brought it to the house on Bridge Street. Michael and Flo had gone to dinner and a movie at the Bay Cinema. Farmer envied them—it was the new Kevin Costner film about a minor-league ballplayer, the kind of script he wished he'd written himself.

"Come around," he said to Stewie Brett on the telephone. Brett sounded as if he was half full of beer. Not a bad idea if you're booked into a motel outside Baytown on a hot summer night.

By the time Stewie showed up, Farmer was in the back yard feeding the mosquitos. Jimmy was on the old garden swing, the kind with two benches on a gliding platform. Farmer could remember his father putting the thing together a long time ago. Now grass was growing through the slats and it was ready to collapse. The old man was going to outlive it. He was simulating movement, although the bolts were rusted rigid, and he was crooning to himself in a tone that was eerily beautiful.

"Kind, kind and gentle is she,
Kind is my Mary—"

As the headlights of Brett's car bobbed into the driveway, Norris got up and went inside. He brought his friend in through the front door and took him directly to the dining room, where the altered *Banner* front page was laid out on the drop-leaf oak table.

"Tell me what you think," he said.

The story Farmer had written was brief. It was positioned beneath the fold, under a single-column heading. FLORENCE FARMER DIES IN ROAD ACCIDENT. The article described how the Baytown actress was

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driving alone down a winding hill near Cedar Lake when the brakes failed and her car went off the road, rolling over. The driver, who was not wearing a seatbelt, was thrown from the vehicle and died hours later of internal injuries.

"Megalo will buy it," Brett said.

"You can either say you tampered with the brakes, or you can leave it an accident." Farmer was folding and unfolding the page to make it look used.

"I'll leave it an accident. Nate cares about Flo, that's how she got to him. He'll feel bad about it."

Farmer put the other copies away in the bottom drawer of the china cabinet. "When are you going back?" he asked.

"Now. I want this finished." Brett went to his car with Farmer trailing him. "I'll call you with Megalo's reaction. If there's a problem," he said, "I can always go and work for Lou Senzi. Lou likes me."

Brett telephoned a day later to say that Megalo was saddened by Florence's death, even though he had sent Brett to get rid of her. There was a risky moment when the restaurant owner talked about driving down for the funeral, but Brett had bluffed him by saying it was over, the family had ordered a fast cremation.

"Now," Norris said, "the hard part begins. Sooner or later, Flo will want to go back to Montreal. When I tell her she can't, she may become difficult."

It happened sooner rather than later. And difficult was not the word. Norris and Jimmy were watching a Pavarotti concert on the PBS channel from Rochester across the lake. The old man was grinning like a conspirator at the giant tenor's performance when Flo appeared in the doorway looking younger than Norris had seen her in years. Her hair was in braids and her face was gleaming. "Where are the Ping-Pong paddles, Dad? I'm about to whip Michael's ass."

"Try the china cabinet," the old man said.

She had been gone for half a minute before Farmer surfaced out of "Che gelida manina" and hurried from the room.

He was too late. In the dining room, Michael was fastening the net on the oak table, using paperback books between the clamps and the wood. Flo had opened the bottom drawer of the china cabinet and was on her knees, reading one of the *Banner* front pages. "What the hell is this?" There was half a grin on her face.

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"I was going to tell you. Stewie Brett took one of those back to show Nate Megalo. Nate is no longer a threat."

"You wrote this?"

"And got it printed. Katie called a friend at the paper."

Michael said nervously, "Are we going to play, or what?"

Flo got up. She showed her brother Norris the coldest face he had ever seen. "But I'm *dead*. I can never go back to Montreal—or anywhere—as me. I have to start again."

"I wanted to save your life."

"You've buried me." She balled the paper and drew back the fist that held it.

"You two!" Michael grabbed his head like a man in a cartoon. He left the room and they heard his footsteps running up the stairs. From the television, the concert-hall audience roared. In his mind's eye, Farmer saw Pavarotti swimming in the applause with that huge handkerchief suspended from his fingertips.

"All right," he conceded, "it was a desperate idea. But you've never understood what you did. Megalo ordered you killed. Stewie Brett was sent to do the job. Killing you would have squared a debt he owes Megalo."

"The bastard."

"No, the opposite! He couldn't go through with it, even though they would have wasted him for letting you live. Instead, he warned me. We had to do something." Farmer picked up a paddle and the Ping-Pong ball. "Now you have to make it good. It's life or death, Flo. Stay out of Montreal."

She took the other paddle and rushed at Farmer. He tried to protect himself, but she was all over him. He was hitting her back and part of the time they were fencing, paddles clashing between them, some of the blows landing, others missing. He started to laugh and so did she, but the humor was impossible to handle and she started to cry. Suddenly Jimmy Farmer was in the doorway, his face a thundercloud.

"The two of you," he threatened, "can just go to bed if this keeps up."

They went back to Montreal. She was ready to take the train, so Farmer capitulated and drove her in his car. They discussed the problem again as they traveled along Cote de Liesse approaching the Decarie Circle. She agreed to lie low at his apartment while Norris sounded out Megalo.

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"He's expecting to see the rewrite of my script," he told her. "He's bound to talk about you. My guess is he's sorry you died. See how this could work? He wanted you gone, but now he wishes you were still alive. When the time is right, I can let him in on what we did. And our reason for doing it."

"Good luck," she murmured. "I'm not staying dead forever."

Nate Megalo's office upstairs over the restaurant was a warm brown cave lined with photographs in identical frames. The owner was pictured with actors, musicians, politicians. They were on the golf course, at the cash desk, on theater stages, getting out of airplanes. Many of the celebrities had become familiar faces with forgotten names. But Megalo appeared and reappeared as a kind of theme, a connecting link. His bald head, thick black eyebrows, and toothpaste grin never changed, although the photographs spanned three decades. Megalo was a cartoon depicted more than once in original sketches interspersing the photos.

He was behind his desk now, seated erect, elbows on the glass surface, fingertips balancing the great head like a globe from which shaded lamplight gleamed. Farmer's revised script lay open before him. Megalo turned a page, smiling like a magician. "You can do even more with the Senzi character," he said.

"The resemblance is very close, Nate."

"Go even further. I want the fool to sweat. Let him bring in his lawyers. By that time the film will be in distribution. Everybody will know what a corrupt individual Lou Senzi is."

"But if he finds out we're doing this—"

"He already knows. Leave Senzi to me."

"It's your money," Farmer said. After three rewrites, the scenario had long since departed from his original intention. Each new draft lost a little more of the spontaneity that had powered it in the beginning. He no longer cared. As he took the script from his backer and dropped it into his briefcase, he understood why so many disappointing movies are made.

He was preparing to leave the office when he saw Megalo at his credenza pouring two shots of whiskey. This had never happened before. He joined the older man and accepted a heavy crystal glass.

"I want us to drink to Florence," Megalo said. His eyes were down, his voice hoarse. "She was a good woman. I never had a chance to let her know how I really felt."

"I understand, Nate."

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"Nobody understands. Anyway, it's too late now."

Farmer almost broke his silence. Then he decided this was not the moment. They both said Florence's name, then drained the whiskey as one.

Megalo turned brisk. "Are you driving uptown? Drop me at the Forum. My car is having a brake job."

They hurried downstairs together. Outside, it was starting to rain, the first fat drops hitting the asphalt. You could smell the wet dust. Farmer was unlocking his car when he heard car doors opening a short distance away. Behind him, Megalo said, "Jesus Christ," and began to run. Farmer turned and saw two men in windbreakers with baseball caps pulled down. They were holding guns and they had Nate Megalo trapped against the back wall of his restaurant. From very close range, they fired six shots into his chest and head. A car backed close to them, doors hanging open. The gunmen ducked inside, tires screaming as they slammed doors and the car bounced across a curb and sped away into traffic.

With Nathan Megalo dead, Florence Farmer was reborn. She told her brother as they left Cote des Neiges Cemetery, "Now he's gone, I wish I could have seen him one more time. Told him what it really was between us."

"That's more or less what he said."

In the car, the windows open on a humid, 85-degree afternoon, both of them suffering in their funeral suits, Florence said, "Poor Norris."

It was a family refrain he had been hearing all his life from positions of comparative well-being. "Why poor Norris?"

"You're the loser in all this."

"I don't get it."

"Finding somebody to finance a script is hard as hell. With Nate gone, your movie may never get made."

"That's a good thing. Lou Senzi would probably have wanted me killed, too." The car picked up speed. "But the best part is not having that rubbish appear in movie theaters with my name on it."

Norris Farmer's secret would last forever. He would never tell Florence or anybody else what he had seen in the parking lot that rainy morning a week ago. With the noise and the action, he couldn't be absolutely sure, anyway. But he had caught a fleeting glimpse of the man driving the getaway car, and under cap and sunglasses it looked a lot like Stewie Brett.

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam: Johnson story by

LILLIAN de la TORRE

Lillian de la Torre's first Dr. Sam: Johnson story appeared in EQMM's November 1943 Department of First Stories. International Polygonics has collected all of the Dr. Johnson stories, except for this new one, in four delightful collections. Speaking of Lillian de la Torre's novels in Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers, *Joanne Harack Hayne wrote, "Like the Dr. Johnson stories, they present thoughtful but lively considerations of mysterious moments in history as these reveal universal human traits."*

Miss Faye had barely begun "As Cupid One Morning," when suddenly at the window opposite appeared a face, a face pale and gaunt in the reflected candlelight, framed by tangled dark hair and distorted with hatred and fury. Miss Faye rose in alarm, wavered a moment, and swooned into Mr. Lidley's arms . . .

THE EARL'S NIGHTINGALE

(as told by James Boswell, 1779)

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

I was the first to find them, in the darkest nook of a dead wall backwards of Drury Lane playhouse, whence she had come. If I had not had a link-boy lighting my way, I should have passed them by. Felicia Faye had been shot through the head at point-blank range. Beside her in his blood, like a knight of old fallen in her defence, lay the ardent young clergyman. The miscreant's weapons, cast down beside them, remained; but the miscreant was nowhere to be seen . . .

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It had all started so agreeably.

I had had, indeed, some trouble in perswading my good friend and mentor, Dr. Sam: Johnson, to pay that first visit to Inchbrooke.

The great man, sage, lexicographer, and *detector,* sat four-square in his old-stile armed chair and would not budge.

"How, Mr. Boswell, Inchbrooke?" he growled. "The seat of the Earl of Sandsea? What have I to do with Earls?"

"Sir, sir," I remonstrated, "the First Lord of the Admiralty, the patron of our South Sea explorers! Of whom Jem Burney as well you know is one, and it is he who urgently desires that we may accept of the Earl's polite invitation and join him in a visit to Inchbrooke."

Jem Burney! That was a different matter, for next to Jem's novelizing sister Fanny, sea-faring Jem was a prime favourite of Dr. Johnson. In the end, Jemmy's perswasions prevailed, and he carried us off with him in his carriage to Inchbrooke.

The sun was low in the west when we entered the park gates. The mansion of Inchbrooke rose before us. Pleasantly built of stone, it displayed a crenellated roof-line, a Gothick tower, and the gryphon coat-of-arms of Sandsea carven in stucco over the arched entrance way.

As our carriage neared the arch, we were startled to be joined by an astonishing escort, a dusky youth with wild black hair, unclad save for his breeches. He rode a large bay horse and discharged a brace of pistols in the air as he galloped. He circled us and made off again, whooping. We were still staring, and Jemmy was laughing, as we pulled up under the gryphon.

A tall man, gold-laced in sea-green, was there to welcome us—the Earl himself! Noel Mountavon, sixth Earl of Sandsea, had clever eyes in a sunbronzed face, and his own sandy hair tied back with a wide ribband. He was smiling broadly.

"Don't mind Omiah, sirs," he said. "He is from Otaheite in the South Seas, and he had never seen a horse or a pistol until I furnished him with both. You see the result! Leftenant Burney knows him of old, not so, Leftenant? But, come, gentlemen, make ready, for the concert is about to begin."

A neat serving-maid led us to our rooms. She had a provocative dimple and a roving eye, and gave me the benefit of both, which I noted for future exploration.

Soon we were established in the white-and-gold drawing room ready for the concert, Dr. Johnson decent in mulberry broadcloth

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with large white wig of state, I in my bloom-coloured breeches and silver-laced coat. The young leftenant, bronzed and eager of eye, squared his broad shoulders in naval blue.

Mr. Omiah, no longer a half naked savage, was now presented to us. He wore the costume of his country, a voluminous sort of toga in some biscuit-coloured stuff. Executing a bow that would have done credit to a dancing master, he uttered sedately, "Howdydo?"

It was now that a late-comer made an entrance, a strong-set gentleman with a keen, mobile face and flashing eyes.

"What, David!" exclaimed Dr. Johnson, embracing him.

"I perceive that you know Mr. Garrick, Dr. Johnson."

"None better, my Lord, for years ago we two came up to London together in search of fame and fortune, and Davy found both at Drury Lane, playhouse, did you not, Davy?"

"I did, sir," replied the great actor-manager in his rich player's voice, "and so did you, sir, among the booksellers."

Now came in our *prima donna*. She was handed by her chaplain, a slender youth in black broadcloth and bands.

"Miss Felicia Faye, gentlemen, my protegee and the nightingale of our concerts."

This lady I regarded with a lively interest, Dr. Johnson with a dubious eye, for everybody knew that Miss Faye was not only protegee but *maitresse en titre* to the musical Earl.

Felicia Faye curtsied low. Her oval face mantled with rosy colour and her large dark eyes were pensive. She wore blush-coloured tissue cut low and cunningly draped, and her own hair piled high and powdered.

The young chaplain handed her to the harpsichord. She gave him a smile and without ceremony began to play. She played with taste and feeling. The soft-eyed young clergyman beside her hung on her every note, and Mr. Omiah, moving up close on the other hand, peered at the action of the harpsichord in silent amazement.

Miss Faye began to sing, giving us "Cockles and Mussels" in a voice unaffectedly sweet and pure. Then Jem Burney, being one of the "musical Burneys," rendered a sea chanty in his strong baritone. To follow Garrick was called upon, but so eloquently did he plead off that Omiah was called in his stead.

Nothing loath, the islander settled his draperies and launched into a song in the manner of his country, a sort of ballad that told of an amorous contest between an old woman and a pretty maiden for the favour of a beautiful youth. The voice was harsh, but so

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spirited was the action, so insinuating the glances, that even Dr. Johnson burst into plaudits.

Not to be outdone, Miss Faye now gave us "The Jolly Milkmaid" with exquisite comic effect, and turned to us laughing.

"Brava, brava!" cried Garrick. "What a treasure you have hidden here, my Lord! Say, may we not have her for Drury Lane?"

"I cannot spare her," replied the Earl, smiling, his eye resting fondly upon her, "but you may have Omiah."

"Omiah! Done! I'll make a pantomime of Omiah, the King of Otaheite!"

"Ver' good!" cried the youth, and performed a creditable *pas seul,* "Omiah dance!"

"Not Omiah! Harlequin shall dance, and Omiah shall have the first box and invite us all to share it with him. Good, that's settled. Now, Miss Faye, what will you sing next? Give us a sad song!"

"I will give you 'The Unfortunate Lovers,' if Mr. Lidley will join me."

The young clergyman bowed, and the duet began.

So sad was the story, so haunting the harmonies, and so feeling the glances exchanged that I could scarce forbear a tear. But a frown drew down the Earl's sandy brows and his bluff voice cut into the last minor note as he cried roughly:

"Sorry stuff, Felicia! Come, let us have a martial tune! Give us 'The Galland Grenadiers!' "

This selection, it soon appeared, was designed to display the noble Earl's prowess on the kettle drums, which he smote furiously with great flourishing of lace ruffles and drumsticks.

I wished much that I had brought my flute. I could indeed have sung a comic song of my own composing, but nobody asked me.

As it turned out, the singing was near its end. Miss Faye had barely begun "As Cupid One Morning," when suddenly at the window opposite appeared a face, a face pale and gaunt in the reflected candlelight, framed by tangled dark hair and distorted with hatred and fury. Miss Faye rose in alarm, wavered a moment, and swooned into the young clergyman's arms.

The Earl was white with rage. "Kate! How has she got loose? Secure her at once!"

Footmen scurried, the face disappeared, and the company broke up.

"I wonder," remarked Dr. Johnson as we sought our beds, "that my Lord lets his deranged tenants thus roam the estate."

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"Alas, do you not know, sir?" said Jem Burney. "That was no tenant, but the Earl's Countess. She is quite out of her wits and lives under restraint in a remote corner of the estate. But she is wily, as you see, and hard to hold. I pity his Lordship."

The next morning Dr. Johnson elected to lie late, but I rose betimes and followed the shooting party. Mr. Omiah now appeared in English garb, armed with his English pistols. With these he blazed away gleefully, tho unsuccessfully, at everything with feathers, not sparing the dunghill cocks and the ducks on the pond. His marksmanship was not improved by the fact that, in too slavish imitation of his patron the Earl, he persisted in shooting with his left hand.

But I took little note of his feats, for of a sudden the pretty serving-maid appeared in the grounds, heading for the lime-tree walk. I made haste to follow and caught her up in the topiary garden. From behind a clipped boxwood bird, I suddenly confronted her.

"Whither away, pretty maid?"

She gasped, turned, and fled. I would not give over now, but followed close on her heels. Against a wall of clipped box, suddenly she vanished. The Inchbrooke maze! Without an Ariadne, without a clew of thread, rashly I followed the sound of her footsteps inside. I was well in when I heard them no more. She was out and away, and I—I was trapped in the maze! Cursing my own folly, I began to run around like a rat in a trap. Then, finding a rustick seat against the boxwood barrier, I sat down and drew breath.

"Dear Miss Faye," said a mellifluous voice from somewhere outside, tantalizingly close to my ear, "pray let us sit here and repose a while. I have much to say to you."

Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this? But what a fool I should look, begging for rescue like a lost child! Better stop my ears and be silent.

"A sermon, Mr. Lidley?" said the lady lightly.

"Why not? I cannot bear it any longer, to see you living in concubinage, doxy to a notorious rake—"

"Dear Mr. Lidley," said the lady gently, "I am no doxy. My Lord took me from the milliner's counter when I was sixteen, and sent me to France to learn musick and become a lady. And like a lady he has cherished me since. You have no call to put such words on me."

"I have a sacred call, for your soul's sake!" cried the clergyman

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passionately. "Miss Faye—Felicia! Leave this life of infamy and turn to me. Be my wife, Felicia!"

"No, Adam, it is too late. Give up such a mad thought, for I never can be yours."

"I will never give you up!" cried the clergyman. "I will be your protector in spite of yourself—to the death if need be, I swear it!"

By this time I had abandoned all thought of stopping my ears. What a scene of sentiment!

But the scene was over. There was a rustle of petticoats as the lady rose. "Enough, Adam. You know his Lordship's temper. I dare not linger more. Farewell."

As their footsteps receded, I realized—there went rescue! In desperation, I chose an alley at random, turned a crochet or two—and found myself in the open at last.

I never did catch up with the dimpled serving lass, but as we returned to London next day, I found myself otherwise well pleased with our entertainment at Inchbrooke.

David Garrick was as good as his word. Soon the papers bore news of his grand new pantomime, *Harlequin Omiah*, with Wright as Harlequin and scenes and machines of unimaginable splendour by the famous Mr. de Loutherberg.

"We must be there!" I cried.

"Stuff and nonsense!" growled the sage. "You may be there if you chuse. Little Davy Garrick's pantomime is very well, sir, for fribbles and moony-eyed Misses and South Sea savages, but not for philosophers. Pray, sir, hold me excused." This time there was no Jemmy Burney to perswade him otherwise, for Jem was off again to the other side of the world.

Boswell proposes, but Johnson disposes. However, a more compelling proposal soon arrived, as a footman handed in an obliging card from the Earl, desiring us to dine with him at his townhouse in company with Mr. Omiah and proceed thence to the pantomime. There is no refusing an Earl. On the night appointed, we duly presented ourselves.

We sat down six at table. His Lordship presided at the head, smiling complaisantly, arrayed in garnet velvet. Miss Faye at the foot wore sea-green French gauze cut low and a high powdered head picked out with golden posies. Mr. Omiah as the guest of honour outdid her in splendour in his cream-coloured brocade richly gold-laced. I was another bird of bright plumage in my silver-laced scarlet

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coat. Only Dr. Johnson in sober earth-brown and the young clergyman in his clerical black struck a darker note.

Indeed the feast started on a rather dark note when the young chaplain, invited to say grace, waxed prolix, inviting the Almighty to forgive us our sins in terms rather too specific to please the Earl.

"Pray, Mr. Lidley," he snapped when Amen finally sounded, "attend to your own sins."

"So I do, your Lordship," replied the youth mournfully, fixing his brooding gaze on Miss Faye.

Arrival of a tureen filled with green turtle soup created a diversion, and we all fell to.

Since the centerpiece of the feast was a mighty baron of beef, and among the side-dishes was a succulent veal pye with plums and sugar, it was definitely, in Dr. Johnson's view, "a meal to ask a man to."

Mr. Omiah, in high fettle, obviously concurred. When the beef appeared, he cheered loudly and, producing his precious pistols from his capacious pockets, he brandished them as one who intends to fire a salvo; an intent which was quickly repressed by the Earl.

"Omiah cel-ebrate," he muttered, putting up his weapons reluctantly.

"Later, Omiah."

"Later, cel-ebrate." Omiah cheered up, and soon his wild laughter was ringing out freely again.

We could not linger over the walnuts and wine, for the theatre called. As we left the table, the Earl muttered testily to Miss Faye in a carelessly audible undertone:

"I tell you, Felicia, I will not be cuckolded."

"What nonsense, Noel," said she with a laugh.

"Hornified, I say, by a lovesick puppy in canonicals, and then sit still while he piously directs the Lord to forgive *my* sins!"

They passed out of ear-shot.

Our party was soon assembled on the doorstep, where the Earl's crested coach was waiting. A light mist was falling. We mounted with dispatch, handing in Miss Faye, propelling bulky Dr. Johnson up the high step, Mr. Omiah and myself springing in after. His Lordship was the last to mount. He had his foot on the step when a breathless boy ran up with a billet and stayed him. My Lord scanned it with a face of dismay.

"Kate again! I should never have brought her up to London!"

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"For surgeons," urged Miss Faye gently. "For her own good, sir."

"Even so. I must go at once."

He turned back. As the coach started off, I glimpsed the devoted eyes of Adam Lidley following us from the pavement.

Mr. Omiah was in high spirits.

"*Now* cel-ebrate!" he cried, and forthwith produced his pistols, immediately taking aim at a passing playhouse pigeon.

"No!" cried Miss Faye sharply. "Disarm him, Mr. Boswell!"

"Put it up, Mr. Omiah!" said Dr. Johnson peremptorily, and the youth reluctantly did so as the coach drew to a halt before the playhouse door.

To us who had seen Mr. de Loutherberg's stage effects before, watching the dazzled Omiah afforded more entertainment than the pantomime itself. It opened with the wing-ladder candles all dark and a chymically glowing moon traversing the sky over Otaheire. Then Harlequin Omiah came on with a leap that made the real Omiah gasp, and the action began.

The next scene shewed the arrival of Captain Cook's ship. It was pretty to see how the painted waves rose and fell as De Loutherberg's stage servants, unseen, turned the crank, and when they drew the painted ship across, Omiah stuttered with excitement.

He approved of Columbine's neat form and gauzy skirts, and urged Harlequin audibly to embrace her. The pageantry as the wedding of the pair was celebrated enchanted him, when Venus and Cupid in their golden car descended on the flyings, his excitement mounted, and he fell a-cheering when the wedded pair was by the same means wafted heavenwards.

Then it was over. As the applause started, the youth leaped to his feet, and though Miss pulled at his coattails, he persisted in bowing elaborately from the box, waving to the crowd and loudly uttering "Howdydo? Howdydo? Howdydo?" until the curtains finally closed.

We came out of the theatre into a scene of confusion. The mist had thickened into black fog, and the departing crowd was elbowing and jostling. In the press we somehow lost Miss Faye, and stood a moment baffled and anxious. Then we separated to seek her in several directions.

It was I who found her by the backward wall, dead beside her faithful protector, who had thus, I saw with emotion, kept his promise to the death. What prescient uneasiness had prompted him to follow her hither?

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Many hands took up the dead lady and her fallen champion and bore them to the Earl's coach, while other by-standers ran for the surgeon and the magistrate.

The Earl was still from home. The victims were carried in and laid out on their beds. The lady was quite dead. But when Mr. Hardiman, the surgeon, turned to Adam Lidley he found him to be, tho insensible, still in life.

"Fortuitous!" rumbled tall Saunders Welch, the magistrate. "Then we have but to wait and he will tell us what pernitious malefactor has perpetrated this execrable atrocity!"

Still the same old Welch, with his sesquipedalian terms!

Suppressing a smile, Dr. Johnson asked: "Have you the weapon, Mr. Welch?"

Welch produced a pair of much-used naval officer's pistols and shook his white head over them dubiously. Then he laid them on the table. The surgeon scrutinized them knowledgeably.

"The story is clear, sirs," he said. "The ball from the first pistol did the lady's business. The second pistol missed fire, and the assailant immediately clubbed it to beat out the gentleman's brains. A left-handed ruffian, we observe, as his victim is bloodied over the right temple. The young man has defended the lady with his bare hands, for see this hand, begrimed as it is and bedabbled with blood."

"A brave young man," I said. "He deserved a better fate."

"I doubt not that he will come to himself in time," said the surgeon reassuringly.

"Then we must wait," said humane Dr. Johnson. "Go home to bed, gentlemen. Boswell and I will do the waiting."

At last the clergyman opened bewildered blue eyes. He looked blankly about, and fixed on Dr. Johnson.

"Who are you?" he demanded faintly.

"I am your friend, Sam: Johnson, who is waiting for you to tell him what happened to Miss Faye."

"What happened— *What happened to Miss Faye?*"

"Miss Faye is dead."

The youth turned his bandaged face to the wall and burst into a storm of weeping.

"Poor lad. We must wait until he quiets."

But when he was quiet, he was asleep.

"Sleeping is healing. Let us leave him. There are others to be questioned. Come, Bozzy."

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We tiptoed away.

At this moment, at last, the Earl came home. He was disshevelled and grim.

"What a goose-chase!" he exclaimed, doffing his gold-laced hat and mopping his brow. "And where do you think we found her at last? Outside the playhouse with the stragglers, squatting there like a child, listening to the ballad-woman."

Something in our silence adverted him.

"What is it, Dr. Johnson?" he demanded quickly.

Gently my friend told him of his loss. He stood stock-still, giving no sign save a tightening of the lips as the story came out.

"But, my Lord," concluded Dr. Johnson, "when Mr. Lidley rouses, he will name the miscreant, who will then pay for his crimes."

"I desire it," said the Earl through stiff lips. "Pray, Dr. Johnson, stand by me, remain in my house until this thing is unravelled."

"I will do so, my Lord."

There was but little more to say; and so having said it, we began all three to ascend. But on the stair Dr. Johnson remarked quietly to me:

"And all this while, where is Mr. Omiah? What may he not have seen as he sought Miss Faye alone in the backward regions? We must enquire. Come, Boswell."

Accordingly, instead of proceeding to our temporary quarters, we made our way to the youth's bedchamber. Our quiet knock went unanswered. When Dr. Johnson pushed the door, it gave. What a slight met our eyes!

On the floor squatted the islander, but how changed! Brocade and fine linen lay discarded. His brown chest and clustering inky curls were streaked with ashes. He was singing to himself on a mournful, wailing note as he cast spices on the dying embers of his fire. The chamber smelled of cinnamon and nutmeg.

"Pray attend me, Mr. Omiah," Dr. Johnson said.

But the islander, absorbed in his song, would not attend. We had perforce to give over the attempt and leave him to his savage rites. So at last we sought our temporary beds.

We were awakened too soon by an alarum in the house. Rising hastily, we followed the running feet where they led, to the young clergyman's bedchamber. There around the bed the household was assembled. The chambermaid who had found him was still there in hystericks, ministered to by the housekeeper with the hartshorn

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bottle. The Earl was there in his padded, brocaded nightgown, and Omiah beside him still half naked and daubed with ashes. The surgeon, summoned in haste, was there, and the magistrate was expected. On the bed the young clergyman lay bleeding, and the surgeon was staunching the flow.

"Ah, Dr. Johnson," he said, "another attack! This time the murderer has attempted to cut his victim's throat, and with Mr. Lidley's own razor! Again a left-handed assailant, you observe, again an arm too weak to finish the business. The same assassin, without doubt."

"Left-handed!" I cried. "Omiah! Mr. Omiah is left-handed!"

"Me no!" cried the islander in alarm.

"Be quiet, Omiah," said the Earl, "and we shall hear truth. Dr. Johnson?"

"Very well, my Lord. Let us ponder the facts in order." Dr. Johnson spoke in measured tones. "There are clear marks by which this murderer may be known. First, as said, he is left-handed. Second, he came from this house."

"How do you make that out, sir?"

For answer, Dr. Johnson took the assassin's bloody pistol from the table and silently pointed to the Earl's gryphon crest impressed on the butt.

"I have been remiss," muttered the Earl, "that anybody could come at my pistols."

"So the murderer came from here, and here he remained to make a second attack on his victim. Now, what moved him to such terrible deeds? Miss Faye died. Who resented her to the death? Countess Kate, whom she replaced? Mr. Omiah, the pistoleer?"

The savage broke out in vehement Otaheitian, but the Earl silenced him.

"Or someone else who cherished a secret anger against the pair?"

"Get on, Dr. Johnson!" snapped the Earl. "Leave speculation! Get on!"

"I will, my Lord. Let us scan this villain's proceedings. He shoots Miss Faye dead at point-blank range. Obviously he is someone whose approach she has no reason to fear. Then he turns the second pistol against her protector. It fails, and he clubs his weapon and attempts to beat out his victim's brains with the butt. His arm is too weak and he fails. He casts down his useless weapons and takes to flight.

"But what a foolish assassin! He finds Miss has a protector. Does he make away with him first? No, he shoots Miss forthwith, leaving her defender to cry Murder!, to spoil his aim, to foil the attempt.

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"But there was no cry of Murder!, his aim was true, the attempt succeeded. What was Adam Lidley doing all that while?"

"Adam!"

All eyes turned to the bed, where the pale young clergyman lay in silent tears.

"Surely not Adam!" cried the Earl. "The murderer has attacked him twice!"

"Look at him," said Dr. Johnson quietly. "Say, Adam. Did you not shoot her yourself? Tell us."

There was no reply as the tears continued to flow.

"Then *I* will tell *you*. Seizing the Earl's pistols, you followed Miss to the playhouse and waited for her to come out. You drew her aside unperceived, put the pistol to her head, and shot her dead."

"Why would he do so?" I exclaimed. "He loved her!"

"He will tell us presently. Then, Adam, you put the pistol to your own head. It missed fire. Desperate, you attempted to beat out your own brains with the butt. You battered your own right temple with your right hand, giving the appearance of a left-handed attack by another. No man can beat out his own brains. You flinched. But such awful efforts struck you insensible and erased memory. Just so did a comparable shock, you will remember, Boswell, blank the mind of that disappearing servant wench, Elizabeth Canning."

"I remember, sir. A morbid oblivion."

"Then, Adam, as the night passed, memory came back to you, and you attempted your own life again, this time with your own razor. Why did you kill her, Adam?"

"How else," whispered the young divine passionately, "could I have saved her from her life of sin? Only her blood could atone, and mine for her. But neither bludgeon nor razor has availed, and what will become of me now?"

As if in answer to his question, Welch, the magistrate, now appeared in the doorway.

"Ah, Mr. Welch," said Dr. Johnson, "you come in good time, sir. Here is your man (indicating the pale young clergyman where he lay in tears). Take him. But mark you, sir, let him be gently used, for the unfortunate young man is not right in his wits."

"I am not mad," protested the unhappy clergyman, "and I desire to die. Take me to Newgate."

So in fact it was done, and Adam Lidley attained his desire upon Tyburn Tree . . .

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All was over when next we adverted to this sad affair. Over dinner at the Mitre I began:

"I marvel, sir, that in this late tragedy of love and madness our usually keen friend Saunders Welch failed to perceive that the Earl's mark was on the pistols."

"Nor did he fail, sir," replied Dr. Johnson with a smile. "You may depend upon it. But when it comes to Earls, Saunders knows his place, while I do not."

"And say, sir," I pursued the subject, "if you knew that Lidley was guilty, why did you play cat-and-mouse with him before denouncing him?"

"Sir, I did not *know*," replied the sage, "but I had Master Adam in my eye. Mixed with the blood on his right palm were the grimy marks of powder such as speckle the hand of him who fires a pistol, especially if it be fouled and misfires. Had he fired those pistols himself? I put him to the test. Rehearsing the facts of the case, I observed him. When in my lucubrations I began to approach the truth, his face told me so. And thus does guilt detect itself."

"Impelled thereto," I replied, "by Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector!"

Author's Afterword

The hardest thing about this story was explaining temporary traumatic amnesia in Eighteenth Century terms.

Amnesia aside, this story really happened. On April 7, 1779, the Reverend James Hackman shot his inamorata, Martha Raye, outside Covent Garden Theatre. Although she had been the mistress of the Earl of Sandwich for nineteen years, and had borne him nine children, Hackman still wanted to marry her. Refused repeatedly, he finally resolved to end it all. He seized a brace of pistols, followed her to the theatre, and shot her down. But the pistol he had reserved for himself missed fire and the attempt to beat out his own brains proved futile.

The love-crazed clergyman was a great popular success. James Boswell found his case so fascinating that he paid him a visit in the condemned cell. He did *not* ride with him to the gallows, although the newspapers alleged that he did.

The Earl of Sandwich, as everybody knows, invented the sandwich rather than leave the gambling table long enough to dine. But he did much more than that. He ruled the Admiralty, he patronized

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South Sea exploration. A lover of music, he performed on the kettle drums, promoted concerts of Handel's music, and took a musical mistress when his wife went mad.

The Earl's guest from Tahiti, Omiah, was in his own way as great a popular success as Hackman. David Garrick did once propose to put the picturesque youth into a pantomime, but he never did. It was left for John O'Keefe, ten years later, to do so.

Saunders Welch was a real Bow Street magistrate. He liked to use big words, according to Boswell, in imitation of his good friend, Dr. Sam: Johnson.

For more about Sandwich and Miss Raye, read George Martelli's *Jemmy Twitcher* (Jonathan Cape, 1962).

For Omiah, see Thomas Blake Clark's *Omai* (The Colt Press, 1940).

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CLARK HOWARD IS THIRD-TIME WINNER OF THE EQMM READERS AWARD

You don't just like him, you love him! In the first EQMM Readers Award competition in 1985, stories by Clark Howard came in a strong first ("Animals") and third ("McCulla's Kid"). The following year a story of his ("Scalplock") again placed first and another ("The Last One To Cry") came in fourth. In 1987 he was so absorbed in writing his blockbuster, *Quick Silver,* he had no time to write a short story. Absence apparently did him no harm with EQMM readers because of the three stories we published by Clark Howard in 1988, "The Dakar Run" in the August issue won first place in your affections and "The Color of Death" in the June issue won third!

Second favorite EQMM story for 1987 was Peter Lovesey's "The Wasp" in the November issue—on the cover of which he gleefully aimed a dagger at his friend and fellow Britisher, writer/poet/critic Julian Symons.

Clark Howard's latest novel, *Hard City,* is due this fall from E. P. Dutton. After completing it and three weeks of outlining three new book ideas, he is looking forward to writing more short stories. Of *Quick Silver,* now in paperback from Signet, *Publishers Weekly* said: "Turbulent emotions and confrontations fill this spellbinding tale that pits highly principled characters against wanton, amoral ones."

Of Peter Lovesey's *On the Edge,* published by The Mysterious Press in February, *PW* said: "Never has the author's wizardry been so effective. Told mostly in racy, ear-perfect dialogue that magnifies the impact of events, the story dodges from one unguessable outcome to the next before the person 'on the edge' falls into an abyss."

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The three strongest runners-up in the 1988 vote were Doug Allyn's "A Death in Heaven" and Carl Martin's "Fatherly Love" (tied for fourth place) and Robert Twohy's "Everybody Goes Home," which came in fifth.

Other stories receiving a notably enthusiastic vote were Takashi Atoda's "The Visitor," William Bankier's "Two Bards with One Stone," Lilian Jackson Braun's "Stanley and Spook," Elizabeth Byrd's "Prodigal Grandson," Deborah Hillyard Clayton's "The Move," Edward D. Hoch's "The Theft of the Faded Flag," Clark Howard's "Silhouettes," Andrew Klavan's "The Last Time," James Powell's "Midnight Pumpkins," and Heidi Vanderbilt's "Judgments."

As in the past, we include refresher synopses of the three winning stories:

"The Dakar Run" by Clark Howard. An alienated father and daughter, Jack and Chelsea Sheffield, drive a superb racing car—"part Land Rover, part Rolls-Royce, part Corvette, built for reliability and stability, power and pace"—in the dangerous Paris-to-Dakar run when Chelsea's boy friend, who built the car, is put out of action with a broken arm after a suspicious assault on a Paris back street.

"The Wasp" by Peter Lovesey. Paul Molloy, a retired insurance broker who has lost his speech after a stroke, is able, through a symbolic gesture, to warn his wife that a visiting cousin from Wales to their beach home on the Queensland coast is not all he seems.

"The Color of Death" by Clark Howard. A Vietnam veteran, Joe Page, with a buddy dying of Agent Orange, vengefully seeks out the retired Marine Corps colonel who sent their unit into the contaminated area during combat.

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

In what is now widely regarded as mystery fiction's *new* Golden Age, there are still a satisfactory number of writers loyal to the conventions and fair-play standards of the *old* Golden Age. Several of the books discussed below demonstrate how the traditional closed-circle whodunit can deliver solid detection, skilled writing and characterization, along with detailed specialized backgrounds, social satire, and even religious ponderings.

*** Gaylord Larsen: *Atascadero Island,* Ballantine, $3.50. Forensic psychologist and religiously uncommitted Christian college professor Jason Bradley, previously met in the author's 1987 novel *The 180 Degree Murder,* seeks a knife-wielding killer among a well drawn cast of suspects in an old castle-turned-monastery on a Spanish island. Especially interesting is a flamboyant televangelist looking for a lost Pauline epistle. The central clue to the culprit is a beauty, the kind you may well kick yourself for missing, it seems so obvious in retrospect.

*** Herbert Resnicow: *The Gold Gamble,* St. Martin's, $15.95. Lovers of the intricate, aritificial, improbable but possible deductive puzzle should flock to Resnicow, one of the most dedicated (and surely most vocal) proponents of formal detection. Sleuths Alexander and Norma Gold have put their money in a murder-threatened Broadway revival of *Guys and Dolls,* but the climax more insistently recalls Busby Berkeley movie musicals like *42nd Street* and *Golddiggers of 1933.*

*** Robert Barnard: *At Death's Door,* Scribners, $15.95. One of the pure detective novel's most reliable performers delivers as usual in a tale involving a senile novelist, his actress ex-mistress, their illegitimate daughter (who is working on a biography of her mother), and a varied cast of relations. Barnard's wit is never absent, though this is less comic than many of his novels, as the leading Agatha Christie analyst offers one of his most Christielike puzzles.

*** Leo Bruce: *Death of a Commuter,* Academy Chicago, $4.95. This classical mystery, first published in Britain in 1967, begins with a tantalizing situation: five regular companions on the London train from Brenstead await the arrival of the sixth. A mysterious figure in dark glasses takes the vacant seat and assures them, "He won't be coming." Schoolmaster sleuth Carolus Deene is in top form here. The plot is good, but even better is the late author's customary skill in bringing his secondary characters to life.

*** James Anderson: *Angel of Death,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $12.95. Also making a belated but welcome U.S. debut is this typi-

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cally ingenious 1978 novel by the author of *The Affair of the Blood-stained Egg Cosy*. The dozen assorted passengers on the private yacht of a Greek shipping magnate learn via anonymous note that half of them have been poisoned and will die within four hours. Scotland Yard's Alec Webster, who may himself be a victim, tries to discover the killer. This variation on Christie's *And Then There Were None* is not Anderson's best, for once having a killer too obvious to surprise, but classical-mystery buffs won't want to miss it.

*** Ed Gorman: *Several Deaths Later,* St. Martin's, $15.95. Diminutive movie critic Tobin, first met in *Murder on the Aisle* (1987), is on a cruise ship serving as guest on a game show with other stars of a cancelled TV series when a Kansas City secretary and celebrity groupy comes out of her shower to find her latest conquest (the show's host) knifed to death. There is much humor in this deceptively light whodunit—including satire on the nature of celebrity and a farcical variation on the old lying-in-wait-for-the-murderer bit—but as usual Gorman is up to more serious things in the grim finale.

*** Max Allan Collins: *Butcher's Dozen,* Bantam, $3.50. With the same combination of well researched fact and artful fiction that characterizes his Nate Heller private-eye novels, Collins recounts Eliot Ness's search for one of the most notorious serial killers of the Thirties: Cleveland's Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run. As always, Collins spells out in an Afterword exactly how much of the story is true (more than you might expect).

*** John Lutz: *Shadowtown,* Mysterious Press, $16.95. One of the most prolific and best of current mystery novelists, Lutz now makes series characters of New York cops, E. L. Oxman and Art Tobin, first met in *The Eye* (1984), written in collaboration with Bill Pronzini. A security guard on the titular soap opera has been murdered, seemingly by a vampire who was previously a character on the show. The TV background is fascinating and the central characters worthy of repeated encores.

** Russell A. Brown: *Sherlock Holmes and the Mysterious Friend of Oscar Wilde,* St. Martin's, $14.95. The latest "newly discovered" Watson manuscript will charm some readers and offend others. The pastiche of Watson's style is good, but the plot is thin. A Holmes-Watson domestic squabble is funny but out of character. And Holmes as roaring homophobe (used here to help grind the author's axe) is an unattractive figure. Still, no book that manages to work in so many Oscar Wilde epigrams could fail to be entertaining.

** Michael Geller: *Major League Murder,* St. Martin's, $15.95. New York private eye and former ballplayer Slots Resnick is hired, by a kindly Catholic priest who doubles as neighborhood bookie, to clear the name of a pitcher suspended for doctoring the ball. Geller, who has worked his way up from the mystery novel's low minors, is a good practitioner of the unpretentious bread-and-butter private-eye novel.

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(But somebody in the book-preparing process—I assume not the baseball-wise Geller—has trouble with the concept of earned-run average. At one point there is a reference to leading the league in ERAs and at another to an imaginary statistic called an earned-run percentage.)
** Robert Noah: *All the Right Answers,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $17.95. This is not a mystery, but it does qualify as a crime novel, constituting an insider's account of the TV quiz scandals of the Fifties. The material on quiz fixing is fascinating, the story of narrator David Beach's personal life far less so.

Readers whose enthusiasm for short mystery fiction is more than casual should consider Gary Lovisi's new quarterly fan periodical, *Detective Story Magazine.* The first two issues (dated May and September 1988) offer some enjoyable stories by promising newcomers and such capable pros as Edgar-winner Robert Sampson, *EQMM* contributor Josh Pachter, Michael Avallone, Will Murray, and Paul Bishop. Ron Wilber's covers have much publish charm. The first two were published at $3.00 each; with #3, the price rises to $4.00. Subscription rate is $15.00 for four issues and $20.00 for six from Gryphon Publications, Box 209, Brooklyn, NY 11228-0209.

Among the reprints is a diverting example of the fun-and-games cozy, Marian Babson's 1987 novel, *Murder on a Mystery Tour* (Bantam, $3.50), wherein murder amusingly strikes a mystery weekend at Chortlesby Manor House. Fans of John Mortimer's PBS favorite Rumpole of the Bailey will find a bargain in *The Second Rumpole Omnibus* (Penguin, $9.95), a large trade paperback gathering twenty tales from three previous collections. TV adaptations are not my usual cup of tea, but the distinguished first-person style of these legal comedies (some of which have been reprinted in *EQMM)* makes Rumpole an exception. Another recent trade paperback provides a knowledgeable and charmingly written guide to some of the best works of mystery fiction: H. R. F. Keating's *Crime and Mystery: The 100 Best Books* (Carroll & Graf, $8.95), first published in 1987.

In the Mid-December 1988 issue, we misdated Alfred Hitchcock's film of Marie Belloc Lowndes' *The Lodger* as 1925. The actual year of production was 1926, of release in Great Britain 1927. Thanks to film and mystery historian Charles Shibuk for the correction.

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Editor's Note: Edgar-winner Jon L. Breen's latest novel is *Touch of the Past* (Walker, $16.95). It features bookstore-owner Rachel Hennings and centers on the murder of a mystery writer famous during the Golden Age and his motives for steeping himself in 1937 memorabilia over the last fifty years of his life.

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Dr. Sam took Mary Best around to the nurses' station and introduced her to Anna Fitzgerald and Kathleen Rogers, the two nurses starting the four o'clock shift. "They seem very nice," Mary remarked later. "Kathleen is so young."

Dr. Sam nodded. "I know I'm getting old when there are nurses who can't remember the World War."

"Well," Mary said, "I just barely remember it."

"You, too." Dr. Sam groaned in mock despair. But his mind was still on Hugh Streeter. "Say, would you like to have dinner with me tonight?"

"I didn't think you were one to mix business with pleasure," Mary told him.

"This may be all business and very little pleasure," Dr. Sam said . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE TWO BIRTHMARKS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Old Dr. Sam Hawthorne was awaiting his visitor, glass in hand. "You're a bit late today. Here, sit down while I pour you a slight libation. I want to tell you about the first month Mary Best was my new nurse, and what happened at Pilgrim Memorial Hospital. It was May of 'thirty-five, halfway through a mild Northmont spring . . ."

This was my first opportunity to take Mary on an extended tour of the hospital (Dr. Sam continued). My office was in a converted wing of the building—converted when the hospital board finally

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agreed that its original eighty-bed space was too much for a town of Northmont's size and potential. It was handy for me, since I could visit my hospital patients between occasional office calls. A good bit of my practice was still devoted to house calls, and would be for another decade. That meant almost daily trips in my red Mercedes to one or another of the surrounding farms or homesteads. On this day, a Tuesday, there were no house calls scheduled, and we had an hour's break before the next office appointment. It seemed the perfect time to take Mary on the tour of Pilgrim Memorial.

My long-time nurse April had married and moved to Maine the previous month. After a brief interlude with a replacement who didn't work out, I'd hired Mary. She was a young woman in her late twenties with bobbed blonde hair and a bright, smiling face. She'd been driving through Northmont on her way to a nursing position in Springfield when she found herself in the middle of a bank robbery. After she helped me solve a particularly vexing mystery connected with it, I'd asked her to stay on as my nurse. She'd declined at first but then reconsidered, and so far neither of us had regretted it.

"This is very well equipped for such a small hospital," Mary observed as she followed me into one of the two operating rooms.

"The place was built for eighty beds, and at the time they figured they'd need two operating rooms and all this equipment. But Northmont just didn't grow as fast as people expected."

"Who's in charge?"

"There's a regular board of directors, but the chief physician is Dr. Endlewise. He's a newcomer to Pilgrim—he's only been here a year. I'll introduce you."

We found Endlewise in his office. He was a short, slight man with a perpetual frown who seemed to me to be in the wrong line of work. I didn't much care for him, but I tried not to let my feelings show as I introduced him to Mary. "I'm taking her on a tour of the hospital," I explained.

Endlewise greeted her in a perfunctory manner and turned his attention to me. "Sam, if you have a few minutes, I'd like you to look at a patient who came in during the night. We need a second opinion. You can charge your regular consultant's fee."

"Glad to assist," I said. "Come along, Mary. You'll get a first-hand view of how Pilgrim Memorial operates."

As Dr. Endlewise led the way down a corridor, he filled us in on the case. "The patient's name is Hugh Streeter. He's up from New

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York looking into the possibility of restoring some of the abandoned farmhouses around here." Northmont hadn't been hit by the Depression as badly as some areas of the Midwest, with their added drought problems, but there were individual cases where farm families had abandoned their land to the banks and gone off to start a new life in the city.

"What's the diagnosis?" I asked.

"Based on the major symptom of painful constrictions below the sternum, typical of angina pectoris, I'd say the man is suffering from a coronary artery disease, probably arteriosclerosis. But there are some unusual aspects. He's relatively young and seems in good physical shape. What's more, some of the pain seems to be lower down, in the stomach area."

"Have you taken X-rays?"

"Of course, but they're inconclusive. You can see them if you like." He turned into a private room, where a dark-haired man in his thirties was resting in bed. He opened his eyes when he heard us enter and tried to sit up. "Just relax," Endlewise told him. "This is Dr. Hawthorne and his nurse, Miss Best. I wanted him to have a look at you."

Streeter extended his hand carefully, as if fearful the pain would return. He was almost handsome, though the smallness of his deep-set eyes gave an odd, calculating expression to his face. "Pleased to meet you, Doctor. Have you any idea what's wrong with me?"

"That's what we're here to find out," I told him.

I gave him a quick but thorough examination. Endlewise handed me the electrocardiogram they'd taken earlier. It was slightly irregular but not abnormally so. "Are you still having chest pains?"

"Not right now."

"What did you have to eat last night, Mr. Streeter, before your attack?"

"The seafood plate at the Magnolia Restaurant. I'm from New York and I was looking for a good place to eat."

The Magnolia sounded better than it was. I'd known people to get a bad meal there as often as a good one, and their seafood was questionable at best. I finished the examination and gave him a reassuring pat. "You seem in pretty good shape to me." I poured him a fresh glass of water from the pitcher by his right hand. "Have a good rest tonight."

Outside in the hall, Dr. Endlewise asked, "Well?"

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"It looks to me like an upset stomach, possibly a touch of food-poisoning. I don't believe his heart's involved at all."

"Just what *I* suspected. I'm going to suggest he be kept one more night for observation and then released."

"Whose patient is he?"

"He came in on his own. Jim Hayett saw him and had him admitted. You don't send anyone with chest pains home without a thorough examination."

I knew there was no love lost between Endlewise and young Hayett, and I hoped not to be involved in any dispute that might develop. Mary, who'd remained silent during my examination, spoke up as soon as Dr. Endlewise left us. "He seems more of a businessman than a physician," she commented.

"He's as much one as the other," I agreed. "Unfortunately, I may have given him fuel for his latest controversy with Dr. Hayett."

"Have I met him?"

I smiled at her. "You'd remember if you had. The nurses are all crazy about him."

"Oh?"

"If he worked last night, he's off duty now. You'll have to meet him later." I took her around to the nurses' station and introduced Anna Fitzgerald and Kathleen Rogers, the two nurses starting the four-o'clock shift. Anna was middle-aged and just a bit cynical. Kathleen was still in her early twenties, fresh out of nursing school, with all the idealism one would expect.

"They seem very nice," Mary remarked later. "Kathleen is so young."

I nodded. "I know I'm getting old when there are nurses who can't remember the World War."

"Well, I just barely remember it."

"You, too?" I groaned in mock despair. But my mind was still on Hugh Streeter. "Say, would you like to have dinner with me tonight?"

She studied me with her pretty blue eyes. "I didn't think you were one to mix business with pleasure."

"This may be all business and very little pleasure," I told her. "I want to check on the source of that possible food poisoning."

The Magnolia Restaurant was located just outside of Northmont, on the road to Shinn Corners. It could best be described as a roadhouse, one of several that had sprung up along country roads fol-

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lowing the repeal of Prohibition. Though it offered a modicum of entertainment, no one would have dignified the place by calling it a nightclub. When we arrived shortly after seven, the parking lot was about half full. I recognized Sheriff Lens's car and remembered that he often took his wife Vera out to dinner on Tuesday nights.

On the way to our table, we stopped off to greet them. "Still like the job, Mary," the sheriff asked with a grin, "or have you had enough of this fella?"

"I still like it," she assured him. "I think Northmont's going to be a lot more exciting than Springfield."

Vera paused over her salad, remarking, "I don't remember you taking April out to dinner, Sam."

"This is business," I assured her, then decided not to ruin their dinner by going further.

"What a friendly woman," Mary said when we were seated at our table.

"Vera's great," I said. "She used to be Northmont's postmistress but she's retired now."

We were halfway through our meal when the evening's entertainment began. A passable male singer was followed by a brisk young comedian, who produced a large-headed ventriloquist's dummy from a suitcase. He was billed as Larry Law and Lucy, and indeed the dummy was female. The falsetto voice he used for Lucy was both funny and convincing. But there was one thing about the dummy that troubled me. Our table was close enough to the constricted, elevated stage and I could see a dab of red beneath the dummy's right ear. Whatever it was—paint or lipstick, most likely—it gave the dummy the appearance of someone I knew. Someone back at the hospital, I thought.

It was a foolish observation and I didn't bother mentioning it to Mary. Instead, I concentrated on the reason for our visit. If there was any possibility of food poisoning at the Magnolia, I wanted to know about it. Mary had ordered fish and I'd chosen steak. Neither would win any prizes, but there seemed to be no hint of contamination. If Streeter had been felled by something he ate, it was probably a chance happening.

"There's the comedian," Mary said over dessert, gesturing toward Larry Law at the bar. She was the outgoing sort, as April had been, and when he walked past our table she said, "We enjoyed your act, Mr. Law."

"Thank you." He was around thirty, probably not too long in the

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business, and that was all the encouragement he needed to stop and chat. "Do you folks come here often?"

"It's my first time," Mary admitted. "But I'm new in Northmont."

"It seems like a nice town." He smiled at us. He had curly black hair and wore a bow tie that was purposely too big for his small face. "I've been here almost a month. I'll be moving on soon, unless they extend me. My agent in New York is working on a radio spot for me. Can you imagine, a ventriloquist on the radio? What's the point? But he says a fellow named Edgar Bergen has been on a few times and is getting popular."

"That's an interesting dummy you use," I said. "Did you make it yourself?"

"I designed it. A friend did the actual carving. I've always been good at female voices and I decided to give it a try."

"Are you staying in town?"

"The singer and I room together. The only trouble with the country is the same thing that's wrong with the city—I hate rats. Do you have many rats around here?"

"Not that I know of," I said. "What's the dab of paint on Lucy's neck for?"

Law chuckled. "A birthmark. It's a long story. Excuse me, will you? I have to get ready for the second show at ten."

The sheriff and Vera finished their dinner and departed with a wave to us. I was waiting for our check when the manager appeared at the microphone to announce that Larry Law and Lucy would not be performing at the second show.

"What do you think the trouble is?" Mary asked.

I got to my feet. "I'd better find out." I left money for the check and arranged to meet her at the car.

I had to walk through the kitchen to reach the small storeroom that doubled as a dressing room for the entertainers. Larry Law was sitting next to an open suitcase that held his brown-haired dummy, Lucy. "What happened?" I asked. "Why can't you go on?"

"I came back and found her in the suitcase like this. I'm calling the police. Who'd want to do this to a dummy?"

A hammer lay on the floor nearby. Someone had used it to batter in the side of Lucy's wooden head.

In the morning, Mary was at her desk when I arrived. "Dr. Endlewise wants to see you as soon as possible," she informed me.

"He's starting to treat me like one of the staff," I said with a sigh.

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"Have you had any more thoughts about what happened last night?"

"I don't know. I suppose someone in the audience took offense at one of the jokes, though they seemed harmless enough to me. You never know what's going to set people off."

Mary glanced at my appointment schedule. "You told Mrs. Fredericks you'd come by to see her son this morning."

I nodded. "Sounds like a routine case of chicken pox, but I'll drive over as soon as I finish with Endlewise."

The hospital director was in his office, looking harried. "Have you heard what happened last night, Sam?"

"I don't believe so."

"We're trying to keep it quiet. Someone got into Hugh Streeter's room around ten o'clock and tried to kill him."

"What?"

Dr. Endlewise nodded. "I couldn't believe it, either. He was asleep when it happened. Someone held a pillow over his face in an attempt to smother him."

I slumped into a chair. "You'd better tell me the whole story."

"Streeter was very restless in the evening. Kathleen Rogers was on duty and she obtained Dr. Hayett's permission to give the patient a mild sleeping powder. He dozed off almost immediately and she returned to the nurses' station. This all happened around nine o'clock. Kathleen says she was busy with other patients for the next hour, putting them to bed, administering medication, and so forth."

"Wasn't Anna Fitzgerald on duty, too? I saw them both earlier in the day, at the start of the shift."

"Anna was in and out. One of the patients needed an X-ray and there was no one else to wheel him down to Radiology."

"Go on," I urged.

"About ten o'clock, when Kathleen was back at her station, she heard a crash from Streeter's room. A pitcher had been upset and fallen to the floor. She ran in and found a pillow pressed down over his face. There were still hand marks on it. But there was no one else in the room."

"Perhaps he turned over in his sleep and got his head under the pillow accidentally."

Dr. Endlewise shook his head. "This was a second pillow he asked Kathleen to take away. She left it on a chair across the room. As

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I said, there were marks of its having been pressed down over his face."

"Did Streeter remember anything?"

"Only the sensation of smothering. It woke him from his drugged sleep and he remembers flailing out with his arms and hitting the water pitcher. The sound of it breaking saved his life."

"But how could the would-be killer get out of the room without being seen by Kathleen?"

"We haven't figured that out." Endlewise hesitated and added, "I know you've had experience in these matters, Sam."

"Have you notified Sheriff Lens?"

"We'd rather not. Streeter seems all right this morning, and he's inclined to think it was just a bad dream he was having."

"I'll want to speak with both nurses."

"Certainly. Both of them are working the four-to-midnight shift again today, but I asked Kathleen to come in early to help with the investigation. She should be here right after lunch."

"I can't promise to discover anything you don't know already," I told him.

At one o'clock, I found Kathleen Rogers finishing lunch in the hospital cafeteria. I got myself a cup of coffee and sat down opposite her. "How are you today, Dr. Sam?" she greeted me.

"Doing well, Kathleen. Dr. Endlewise asked me to look into what happened with one of your patients last night."

"Hugh Streeter?"

"Yes. You say someone tried to kill him."

"I'm sure of it."

"How could anyone have entered his room without your being aware of it?"

She was a large-boned, handsome young woman with the sort of commitment that was necessary in a good nurse. She spoke in a precise manner that begged for belief. "You know the layout, Doctor. The patient's room is down the hall from the nursing station. I can't see the door from my desk. Visitors have to pass by me, but often I'm away from the station or otherwise occupied and don't see where they go. And there's a fire exit at the end of the corridor that must be kept unlocked at all times. Anyone could have entered or left that way."

"But you heard the glass break and you started down the hall at once?"

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"Yes. Mr. Streeter was alone. The bathroom door was open. I saw no one leave the room. As I've said, anyone might have entered or left through the fire exit, but I saw no one."

"How do you explain that?"

She shrugged. "I can't. All I know is there were handprints on the pillow where it had been pressed over Mr. Streeter's face."

"What about Anna Fitzgerald? Did she see anything?"

"No, I—" She hesitated, looking uncomfortable for the first time. "I haven't seen her since it happened."

"Haven't seen her at all?"

"Dr. Sam, she's my superior. I don't want to get her in trouble."

"You'd better tell me what you know," I told her gently.

"Well, for the last few weeks she's been leaving early some nights before her shift ends. If things are quiet, she leaves around ten-thirty or eleven and I cover for her. I think she's meeting someone."

"She did this last night?"

"I didn't see her after ten o'clock, after the trouble with Mr. Streeter."

"Did she tell you she was leaving early?"

"No, and that was odd."

"I'll have to tell Dr. Endlewise about this."

She looked unhappy, but didn't argue.

"One other thing, Kathleen. Tell me about the pillow. I understand it wasn't on the bed."

"Mr. Streeter had me remove it when I brought him his sleeping powder around nine o'clock. He said he'd sleep better with just one pillow, so I put it on the chair by the window."

"Anna's disappearance after the attack on Streeter would seem very suspicious. Can you think of any reason she might have tried to smother him?"

"No! She's a nurse, Dr. Sam."

I could see I was upsetting her and I finished my coffee and left.

As I was heading back toward my office wing, I spotted Jim Hayett standing by the locked door of operating room #2, peering tensely through the oval window. "Sam!" he called to me. "Could that be a body in there?"

I glanced through the window in the adjoining door. Though the room had no real windows, enough daylight came through the glass brick sections in the far wall to reveal a sheet-covered figure on a gurney next to the operating table. I looked at the locked deadbolt holding the two swinging doors closed. "I'll get the key," I told him.

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Most times, Pilgrim Memorial had little use for two operating rooms, and the second one was kept locked. Endlewise carried the one key with him on his ring. I found him in his office and told him what we'd seen.

"Impossible," he said. "That room hasn't been used in nearly a month." But he got quickly to his feet and followed me out of the office. When we reached the operating-room doors, he frowned as he peered through the portholes, then used his key to unlock the bolt. Hayett and I entered the room on either side of him, pushing open both swinging doors.

It was Endlewise who lifted the sheet and exposed the body of the missing nurse, Anna Fitzgerald.

At my side, Hayett gasped, but somehow I wasn't surprised. I'd almost expected it since the moment he'd pointed out the gurney and its odd cargo.

Anna had been dead since the previous night, and I'd never bought the suggestion that she'd left duty two hours early without telling Kathleen. "Look at those bruises on her throat," Endlewise said, his voice barely a whisper. "She's been strangled."

I was looking at something else. Her long brown hair had fallen away from her neck and I could see the small birthmark beneath her right ear, in the same position as the dab of paint under the ear of Larry Law's dummy. I remembered noticing it before at some time and half remembering it at the Magnolia last night.

"We'd better phone Sheriff Lens," Jim Hayett was saying. I glanced around at the four walls, broken only by the glass bricks and a small storage closet, which we quickly examined. We'd just used the room's only entrance, and the key to it had been on Endlewise's ring. Either Endlewise himself had strangled her, which seemed highly unlikely, or the killer had left the room the same way he left Hugh Streeter's hospital room, without being seen by Kathleen.

I was in my office later when Sheriff Lens stopped by. He'd examined the body and talked with the others. Now it was my turn.

"You know anything about this Fitzgerald killing, Doc?"

"Some background, but nothing much that will help you," I told him and ran through the events of the previous evening at Pilgrim Memorial.

The sheriff thought for a moment. "Sounds as if Anna Fitzgerald

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surprised someone trying to smother Hugh Streeter and got herself killed for it." Then he added, "Funny thing. You know that ventriloquist we saw at the Magnolia last night?"

"Larry Law and Lucy?"

"That's the one. He called in with a complaint. Someone broke into his dressing room between shows and battered the dummy's head with a hammer. What do you think of that?"

"Mary and I were still there when it happened," I told him, adding what little I knew.

After the sheriff left, I went out and filled Mary in on the latest developments. "You know, Larry Law never did explain about that dab of paint on the dummy's neck," she said. "It's a slow afternoon here. Why don't I drive out to the Magnolia and ask him about it?"

"Would he be there this early?"

"I'll track him down," she assured me.

I'd been thinking about Law myself, but the one I really wanted to question was Hugh Streeter. "Go to it," I told her. "But be careful. If he acts in the least bit odd, get away from there quickly."

"Do you think he's a suspect? It was nearly ten o'clock when we were with him in his dressing room. Wasn't that the same time Streeter was attacked and Anna Fitzgerald disappeared?"

"I know. I'm not happy about any of it. Everyone seems to have an alibi of some sort. Dr. Endlewise has the only key to the operating room and Sheriff Lens just told me he's confirmed that Endlewise was home with his family all evening. If you learn anything helpful from Larry Law, I'll be grateful."

I closed up the office, leaving word at the hospital admissions desk as to where I could be found. Then I went down the hall to Hugh Streeter's room. He was sitting up in bed, looking pretty good. "How are you doing today?" I asked.

"Okay, I guess. I met you yesterday, didn't I?"

"Yes. Dr. Endlewise asked me in for an opinion on your case."

"I thought Dr. Hayett was caring for me."

"We're all looking after you," I assured him. "I came about what happened last night. I understand there was a pillow over your face."

"I don't know how it happened. The nurse had given me a sleeping powder and I'd dozed off. First thing I knew, there was pressure on my face and I couldn't breathe. I thrashed out and knocked a pitcher off the table. Luckily, that brought the nurse." He held up his left wrist. "I got cut from the glass."

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It was a mere scratch, not enough to bandage. "Do you think someone tried to kill you?"

"At first I thought the whole thing was a dream, but now I don't know. Nurse Rogers was just in and told me someone killed the other night nurse." He avoided my eyes, but I could see the news had disturbed him. I decided on a long shot.

"Mr. Streeter, was the other night nurse, Anna Fitzgerald, somehow related to you?"

"Related to me? I never saw her before I was admitted here."

"Nevertheless, I can see a resemblance between the two of you, especially around the mouth. It makes me wonder—"

Streeter moistened his lips. "I'm not sure. She might have been my half sister."

I sat on the edge of his bed. "You'd better tell me about it."

"My mother was married before. She told me once she had a daughter by her first marriage who was a few years older than me. But I never met her."

"Did you think she might be here in Northmont?"

He sighed. "I'd better start at the beginning. My mother died last year. She told me before she died that she was leaving nearly a thousand acres of property in her will to me and my half sister Anna. The land is here in Northmont, where she lived when Anna was a baby. I came here last week to inspect the property, and by a crazy chance I ended up here in the hospital where she worked as a nurse. I wasn't sure until I noticed a birthmark on her neck. My mother had told me about that."

"Did you tell her who you were?"

"I never had the opportunity. I never saw her after the time I noticed the birthmark."

I stood up. "One more question. Who is Larry Law?"

"I don't believe I know the man," he said, looking puzzled.

"Larry Law and Lucy?"

He shook his head. "Sorry. I can't help you."

"Thank you, Mr. Streeter." I started to leave.

"Is it true I can leave today, Doctor? Dr. Hayett says he can't find anything wrong with me."

"You certainly didn't have a heart attack. We suspected some sort of food poisoning, but I think that's been ruled out, too."

"As long as I can get out of here," Streeter said with a smile, "I don't care what it was . . ."

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I'd hardly reopened my office when Sheriff Lens poked his head in. "Where's that cute nurse of yours, Doc?"

"She went out to the Magnolia to talk with Larry Law."

"*She's* playin' detective now, huh?"

"She might come up with something we missed," I challenged him.

The sheriff sat down. "I already came up with what we missed, Sam. I know what the Larry Law link is."

"What do you mean?"

"The birthmarks. He painted that red spot on the dummy's neck so she'd look like Anna Fitzgerald. You musta noticed that both Anna and the dummy had the same color hair."

"So she'd look like Anna." I repeated the words slowly, trying to make sense of them. "Why would he?" And then it all came together. "Of course! She was leaving her job early so she could meet Law after his second show at the Magnolia—he's the mysterious boy friend!"

"You got it, Sam. The Magnolia owner confirmed that she's been comin' around the last few weeks, ever since she met Law near the beginning of his engagement."

"But Larry Law couldn't have killed her if he was out at the restaurant."

"It wouldn't seem so," Sheriff Lens agreed. "I got a preliminary autopsy report that indicates she was strangled manually somewhere around ten o'clock last night, give or take an hour. The fingermarks show that the killer was in front of her when he did it, lookin' her right in the eyes."

"So that lets Law off the hook."

"Maybe not. Let me try this one on you, Sam. Larry Law battered his own dummy so he'd have an excuse for canceling the second show, then he drove in here and strangled Anna because of some lovers' quarrel, or because he was tired of her and she wouldn't let go. Then he tried smothering Streeter just to confuse us."

"But how did he get into the operating room?" I said. "How'd he vanish so easily from Streeter's room?"

"I gotta admit I'm stumped there. Dr. Endlewise has the only key and he was home with his family. As for the attack on Streeter, all I can think of is maybe Nurse Rogers isn't telling the truth."

But I wasn't satisfied. "Think about this a minute, Sheriff. Why should Larry Law go to all the trouble of canceling his second show so that he could get down here and strangle Anna at the hospital when he could have waited for her to come to him, as she did most

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nights? The remote area around the Magnolia is a far more private place for a murder."

Before Sheriff Lens could respond, Mary Best walked in. "Have you solved the mystery yet?"

"No," I told her. "Have you?"

"Part of it," she said. "Larry Law lied about the whole thing. He bashed in his own dummy's head. It wasn't too great a loss—he always travels with an identical spare Lucy when he's on the road."

Sheriff Lens glowed in triumph. "What did I tell you, Sam?"

My mouth must have dropped open. "You mean he bashed the dummy as an excuse to cancel the second show?"

"Of course not," Mary responded, puzzled by my question. "He did it because two nights ago, after his show, a stranger came to his dressing room and gave him a thousand dollars in cash to do it."

"What?"

"Exactly. He was paid to smash his own dummy—and for that much money he didn't ask questions. He did it and then reported the vandalism to the police just as he'd been instructed."

I reached a quick decision. "Can you bring him here, Mary?"

She smiled. "He's waiting outside in my car."

I snatched up the telephone and called Dr. Endlewise's office. His secretary informed me he'd gone with Dr. Hayett for a final look at Hugh Streeter before releasing him.

I hung up. "Come on!" I told the sheriff. "There isn't a minute to lose! Mary, bring Larry Law and meet me in Streeter's room!"

It had all come together for me at last, the locked operating room, the broken glass, the strangled nurse. When we reached Streeter's room, we found Endlewise and Hayett chatting with him while he dressed. All three looked up as we entered with Larry Law.

The ventriloquist didn't hesitate. He held out his hand and said, "It's good to see you again. I did just what you said with the dummy. I earned my thousand dollars."

Hugh Streeter tried to run, but his pants were only partway on and tripped him up at the door.

"You have to look at the crime from Streeter's viewpoint," I said later back in my office with Mary, the sheriff, and Endlewise. "He'd inherited some potentially valuable land but had to share it with a half sister he'd never met. He decided he'd rather kill her and have it all for himself. His mother had told him more than he admitted, and he knew Anna Fitzgerald was a nurse at this hospital,

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and that she had a birthmark. But if he simply came up here and killed her, he'd be among the leading suspects because of the inheritance. So what should he do?"

"This better be good," Sheriff Lens muttered. "There's an awful lot unexplained in this case."

I ignored the interruption. "He'd already planned to fake a heart attack and get himself admitted here. By luck, two nights ago he was dining alone at the Magnolia Restaurant when he spotted the dummy with a dab of paint like a birthmark. Somehow, probably from one of the waitresses, he learned that the birthmark was supposed to make the dummy look like the ventriloquist's current flame, a local nurse. So he offered Law a thousand dollars to bash the dummy's head with a hammer the following night between shows. It wasn't a big thing for Law because he had a spare dummy—he didn't realize he was being set up as a murder suspect."

"I'm not surprised about faking the heart attack," Endlewise said. "I was suspicious about that from the start. But how could he kill Anna? He never left his room."

"That was the key to his whole plan. He knew he'd be kept in the hospital for observation, and when Kathleen brought him the sleeping powder last evening he simply emptied the glass into his water pitcher, first distracting her attention by asking her to move his extra pillow to a chair. When Anna came in later to check on him, he took her by surprise somehow and managed to strangle her before she could make a sound."

"But the body—" Mary protested.

"He hid it in his bathtub, behind the shower curtain. He left the door open, taking a chance Kathleen would think the bathroom was empty and wouldn't check it further. Then he returned to bed, pushing the second pillow down over his face, and upsetting the water pitcher to summon help—also cleverly disposing of the remains of the sleeping powder."

"All right," Endlewise said. "How did he get her from the bathtub into a locked operating room at the other end of the building?"

"He waited until after midnight and carried her down the hall to the unlocked fire exit, then around the building and in one of the exits near the operating rooms. Room #2 was never really locked, you see. The bolt was engaged but those are swinging doors. One door must be anchored with bolts into the floor and top of the door frame before swinging doors can be truly locked—otherwise, if both doors are pushed inward together the bolt disengages and the doors

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open. Try it yourself if you don't believe me. After leaving the body on the gurney inside, he carefully closed the swinging doors together until the bolt in one door engaged the slot in the opposite door once again. When I thought about it, I knew that was what happened. We never tried simply pushing the doors open, but after you unlocked the bolt, Dr. Endlewise, Hayett and I each pushed open a swinging door, proving neither one was anchored to the floor by another bolt."

Sheriff Lens snorted. "You're telling me Streeter was lucky enough that no one found her body in the shower, no one saw him carry her out the fire exit, and he found the operating room unlocked. That's a lot of luck!"

"All murderers take chances, Sheriff. Maybe he noticed those swinging doors earlier, on the way to his room. Maybe he had some other hiding place in mind. But he wasn't so lucky. We caught him in less than twenty-four hours, didn't we?"

"How'd you know?" Mary asked.

"Streeter showed me a scratch on his left wrist and said he got it when he knocked over the water pitcher. But he was on his back at the time of the supposed pillow attack, and when I examined him yesterday I remember the pitcher being by his right hand, not his left. I think Anna scratched him as he strangled her and he tried to cover it with that lie. And the pitcher didn't break until it hit the floor, so knocking it with his wrist wouldn't have scratched him, anyway.

"Then there was the matter of Larry Law. In trying to confuse us with the dummy business and call the sheriff's attention to Larry as a suspect, Streeter was being too clever for his own good. When I mentioned Larry's name, he denied he ever heard of him. Yet he told us he ate at the Magnolia the previous night, the same night a stranger offered Larry money to batter his dummy."

When both the sheriff and Dr. Endlewise departed, it was my turn to ask Mary Best a question. "How'd you get the truth out of Larry Law so fast?" I wanted to know.

She grinned at me. "Remember his fear of rats? I told him the county jail was full of them."

"It was one of my most complicated cases," Dr. Sam concluded, "but the solution came quicker than I'd expected. That wasn't true of my next case, which involved me personally and threatened my very right to practice medicine. But that's for next time."

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

"Father himself saw the need for change," Harry told Maurice.

"Then it's odd he never broached the subject to me."

"Ah, but you're not the boy for change, are you, Morrie? 'Do as we've always done,' that's your motto. Tried and tested methods. But tried and tested methods don't do in the age of the computer. Industry has to develop and expand or go to the wall. Those were Father's very words."

"I don't remember them," Maurice said.

To quote Publishers Weekly *on Robert Barnard's latest novel,* At Death's Door, *"Appealing and distasteful characters alike make this another highly entertaining diversion from the author of* The Skeleton in the Grass, Out of the Blackout, *etc. . . ."*

POST MORTEM

by ROBERT BARNARD

Throughout my father's funeral my mother sternly kept back her emotion. At home afterward, with the relatives and the top people from the factory, she was controlled, almost gracious, though often I noticed her eyes downturned, her mouth working. Only when the stragglers had been seen from the door and the last car had driven away did she come back into the lounge, let out a great whoop of triumph, and throw her black hat in the air.

"Hooray! Shot of him at last!"

I looked at her disapprovingly. There were no neighbors to hear, for The Maples is set in extensive grounds, but in the kitchen was Mrs. Mottram, who had prepared and served the funeral bakemeats. I pointed meaningfully in that direction.

My mother leaned forward in her chair.

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"I don't give a ——— for Mrs. Mottram."

But she said it in a low voice, which showed that she had taken my point.

Now she started moving restlessly around the room. When our fellow mourners were here, she had pressed food on them but had eaten nothing herself. Now she greedily sampled everything, eating voraciously as if she had ordered the lavish spread precisely with this moment in mind.

"I wonder if I should phone the solicitor."

"Of *course* you shouldn't. How would it look?" Seeing this argument carried no weight with her, I added: "Anyway, you know Mr. Blore is away. Otherwise he would have been here at the funeral. He wouldn't want any underling to deal with it. He said he'd be back tomorrow."

My mother's mouth grimaced into a little moue.

"But how on earth are we going to get through the rest of the day?"

In the end, I took her for a long drive, well away from Rotherham, where the McAtee works and the family home are situated. In a small Derbyshire pub, she got thoroughly sloshed on her favorite gin slings, and that kept her happy till morning.

It was as much as I could do to stop her ringing Mr. Blore immediately after breakfast. "Solicitors don't get to work at nine o'clock," I said. As it was, she made an awful impression by ringing at twenty past, and finding he was not due in till ten-fifteen. She finally spoke to him at twenty past ten, and though she conducted her end of the conversation with the sort of decorum she had shown at the funeral, when she put down the phone she seemed oddly dissatisfied.

"When I said we had a copy of the will here, he said: 'Well, we'll discuss all that tomorrow.' "

That should have told me.

My mother dressed the part next day. She is inclined to a too bright lipstick for a woman of her age, and to use an inappropriate nail varnish. People say she is vulgar and grasping, but we get on all right. Not because I am vulgar or grasping, but because I like a quiet life. Anyway, her black was irreproachable.

Mr. Blore treated us with the utmost respect, as no doubt he always did treat grieving relatives, whether he liked them or not (and in the case of my mother he certainly didn't). He ushered us

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to seats, offered dry, solicitorial condolences to my mother, inquired of me if the funeral arrangements had been satisfactory. We fed him back with muted platitudes. Then he sat back in his chair and let us have it.

"But that's bloody impossible!" screamed my mother, her mask slipping badly. "How could there be a later will? He made this one just before he became ill. He had no chance—"

"Nevertheless he made one."

My mother thought. "Mrs. Mottram! I bet my bottom dollar—"

Mr. Blore inclined his head. "And I believe there were days when you had other cleaning staff in."

"Spick and Span. They gave the house a thorough clean every fortnight—I always went out when they came. Witnesses! I must have been mad!"

"And your husband had access to a typewriter."

For those little notices to the workforce—exhortations, pep talks, ironic little comments on slacknesses—which I had dutifully pinned up on the notice-board, and which had aroused more derision than respect since he was no longer on the shop floor to enforce his will.

"Oh, God, yes, he had a typewriter," said my mother impatiently, the social veneer having been cast off long since. "But this new will—"

"Is by and large the same as the old one. I need not go over the provisions of that. Unfortunately, the most substantial clause, the one leaving the works and the bulk of the fortune to you, with reversion to Mr. Maurice McAtee—" he nodded in my general direction, and I got the strongest possible sense that he was enjoying himself "—is changed."

"Yes. Hurry *up*, man."

"He expresses the hope that Mr. Maurice will be allowed to remain in his present job, as he has been a conscientious works manager, but he doubts he has the drive or flair to head the enterprise. He therefore names Mr. Henry McAtee—"

"*Harry?* But he hated Harry! He cast him off!"

"A change of mind, I fear. Mr. Henry is to inherit both the factory and the residual fortune."

"You're joking! What about me?"

"You, Madam, are not named in the will."

"But that's impossible! That's not legal!"

"It is perfectly legal, Madam. A man or woman may leave his possessions to whomsoever he pleases. It *is* possible for you, Mrs.

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McAtee, to sue in the High Court for a more adequate provision. Normally they would award you the sort of settlement you might have expected had you and your husband divorced. Doubtless you will consider this course. Nevertheless, I have to warn you that there are certain—er—allegations in your husband's covering letter to me that would have to come out in court, and which might well—er—lead the court to take a very different view of the matter."

It really broke my mother up. In the car going home, she kept sobbing and wailing, "After all I'd done." It was notable that she did not add "for him." That wasn't what she meant at all. As we neared The Maples, she muttered in a vitriolic whisper, "I'll strangle his bloody pigeons."

My father had had a love of racing pigeons, which my mother said was a sentimental relic of his working-class origins. Me, I think he genuinely loved the things. More than he did us. As soon as we got home, my mother went out through the kitchen to execute her threat, but she found it a good deal more difficult than she expected. She ended up with her frustration still boiling over, and nothing more to show for her efforts than a few pigeon feathers scattered around the kitchen garden.

My brother Harry arrived home the next day. That in itself showed that he had been forewarned, or forepromised. The solicitor had said he would write on the day he spoke to us. Harry was wearing a sober suit. His usual sort of dress was casual-sexy, in keeping with his image of himself as a trendy pop-star type. He had no doubt bought the suit in preparation for his good fortune. Typical of Harry that he should have spared himself the bother of the funeral.

He was met at the door by Mrs. Mottram, who showed him into the lounge. "Awfully sad occasion," he kept muttering as he kissed my mother and shook my hand, his eyes sparkling with pleasure the while. When Mrs. Mottram had retired to the kitchen, he threw himself into an armchair and let out a great bellow of laughter.

"Oh, what a turn-up for the book. If you two could only see yourselves! You look like dogs who've just had a particularly juicy bone pinched from under their noses."

My mother could barely refrain from buffeting him around the head, as she so often had had to do in his delinquent childhood. But that day we observed the decencies, she and I. Mrs. Mottram was around all day, with a fair idea of what was going on but an incom-

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plete one. We had no desire—my mother and I had no desire—to feed her raging hunger for gossip material. We ate the meal she cooked us decorously, while Harry fed us a censored version of what he had been doing in the seven years since Father had shown him the door of The Maples and told him (erroneously) that that was the last time he would see the inside of it.

The next day, Harry once again donned his sober suit and once again assumed his sober manner, and he and I went down to the factory. Changes made in the last few years made it necessary for him to be shown around it, but I had no intention of doing that myself and watching him gloat. I handed him over to the foreman and went on with my own work. Harry was remembered from the old days and thoroughly disliked (he had done the "boss's son" act to an outrageous degree, and treated everyone from floor-cleaner to foreman with contempt). Now he listened with a display of humility, but as the day wore on I heard him say things like "That will have to be changed," or "I'm sure we can devise a better system than that," or—most ominously—"What seems to be needed is a daring policy of expansion to pull us out of the doldrums." This last brought visions to my mind of lunatic schemes and spectacular bankruptcy. I had told no one at the factory of Harry's good fortune, but by the end of the day the whole work force must have guessed.

As he left, my brother said to the foreman: "I'll be in at nine and doing a full day's work tomorrow. Start as you mean to go on, eh?"

Mrs. Mottram was off that day. My mother cooked a dinner of all the things my brother particularly disliked. He maintained a flow of unabating geniality through it all, and treated me to a long account of all the changes he intended to initiate at the McAtee works.

"Father himself saw the need for change," he concluded over the spotted dick, which he merely picked at. "That's why he put me in charge."

"Then it's odd he never broached the subject to me," I said sourly.

"Ah, but you're not the boy for change, are you, Morrie? 'Do as we've always done,' that's your motto. Tried and tested methods. But tried and tested methods don't do in the age of the computer. Industry has to develop and expand or go to the wall. Those were Father's very words."

"I don't remember them," I said.

"Well, you wouldn't, would you?" Harry grinned, his habitual self-satisfaction oozing from every pore. "They were in the letter to

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me—the one in which he explained the new—arrangements. He was very considerate: told me to wait a day or two after the funeral before I came down to give you two time to get used to the change in your fortunes. Otherwise, of course, my natural instinct would have been to pay my last respects to the old boy." He crumpled his napkin beside his plate and stood up. "It was an interesting letter altogether."

That silenced us. Somehow, though he said it casually, it was as if every word was italicized. The way he looked at us, first Mother and then me, added to the effect. He took a folder of facts and figures from the factory and went up to his bedroom.

My mother was devastated, as well she might be.

"He'll have to go," she said. "We'll have to get rid of him."

"Are you mad? With us the two obvious suspects? You don't even know whether he's made a will or not. He may have a wife, a live-in girl friend, a child. Then where would you be? I suppose if you *want* to spend the rest of your life doing Open University courses with Myra Hindley—"

That silenced her. I think she noticed that I said "you," not "we." It was perhaps cruel of me to rub in my separateness from her by adding: "If it's not a question of that already."

The next morning, Harry merely snatched a slice of toast on the wing and gulped down a cup of tea. Mother and I ate in silence. The reason was that we had both of us heard Harry, while he was in the bathroom, going through the medicine cabinet. He could have found nothing, of course, but it made us uneasy. So did the fact that the reason for his lateness to breakfast was that he was having a long talk with Mrs. Mottram in the kitchen. He drove off in his own car to the factory, and I heard little of him during the day, though I registered the fact that he had already put the shop stewards' backs up—unions like change no more than management, and Harry's manner was not an emollient one.

His needling of us began in earnest that night. Mrs. Mottram's hours were staggered—sometimes she came in early, cooked lunch, and left around teatime, at others she came late and stayed to cook the dinner. That night she should have been off, but stayed late "to oblige Mr. Harry." Harry fetched his own plate from the kitchen, tasted it, and then said:

"Marvelous. Tastes just like steak-and-kidney pie should."

That was all, but it was enough. The next evening, when my

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mother was cooking the dinner again, Harry ostentatiously phoned for a table at Rotherham's best restaurant. It was all show, of course, all a battle of nerves—he had eaten my mother's cooking on the first evening—but it was a battle of nerves my mother and I did not feel we were winning.

He had been in the saddle at the works for several days—faces there were getting grimmer, and I was imagining financial disaster staring us in the face—when he took the opportunity of one of Mrs. Mottram's dinners to come a little further out into the open.

"Bumped into a chap I used to know today."

"Oh?"

"Jack Lippincott. Used to be at school with him. He's a dispensing chemist with Boots these days."

"Oh?" I kept the quaver out of my voice. Why, in any case, should there be one? I didn't know what Mother had got up to. Or perhaps that should read: I didn't *know* what Mother had got up to.

"Useful knowing a chemist. He's doing a little job for me."

My mother said nothing. This was her new policy—to say nothing beyond conversational banalities to Harry. I didn't see that it could get her anywhere, but then I couldn't think of any policy that would get her anywhere.

There was nothing to do but wait.

Two days later, he took up the subject over sherry. (Actually, Harry was drinking beer. He wasn't a beer man, but he drank cans of it, no doubt to make the point that opened bottles can be tampered with.)

"I got the report on that little job I gave Jack Lippincott to do today."

This time both Mother and I kept silent.

"I took him some bottles of Father's Polifexin."

"That's nonsense. You couldn't have."

That was my mother—it was out before she could remember her policy.

"Couldn't have? Because you put them in the garbage bin? Actually, Mrs. Mottram retrieved them before the dustman came."

He smiled round at us, like a little boy before he starts torturing a bird. We kept quiet. It never does the bird much good to squawk.

"And Lippincott tells me roughly what I expected—that while two of the eight bottles do indeed contain Polifexin, the other six contain a mixture that he can only guess at. He thinks there's lemon juice,

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Cointreau, a patent cough linctus, and maybe other things, too. 'It doesn't taste the same,' Father said in his letter to me. You tried to make it so it did, but it didn't quite work."

"This is ridiculous," said my mother vitriolically. "If I was trying to poison your father—"

"I'm not suggesting you were doing anything of the sort. You were withholding the medicine he needed after his first stroke."

"Either way, why didn't he protest to Mrs. Mottram? Ask her to help, send for the police? Come to that, why didn't he say anything to Dr. Craigie? He came seldom enough, God knows, considering your father's standing in the community, but he did come."

"I've thought about that. Mrs. Mottram had suspicions of her own, which is why she retrieved the bottles. She tells me there were a lot of lemons bought that she couldn't account for because no one in the house likes them, or uses them in tea or in gin-and-tonics. But you're right: Father could have told her of his suspicions, or the doctor. I have a theory about that."

"What?" I asked.

"He wanted to die. After all, what sort of existence was it, stuck up in his bedroom there after the active life he'd led—running the factory, playing cricket, later bowls, walking a lot, seeing to his pigeons and racing them? No, he must have known all those things were of the past. He wanted it over with."

"He had only to swallow a bottle of aspirin," said my mother in that bitter voice she had used when speaking of my father since his death—and before it, come to think of it. "There was one by his bed. God knows I hoped often enough that he would. It would have saved us all a lot of trouble."

"I'm not sure he had any desire to save you trouble. He must quite soon have got a suspicion of what you were trying to do. Father—remember, Morrie?—always had a wonderful sense of humor."

That was true enough. Throughout our childhood he was full of conundrums, practical jokes, and jolly japes—until, that is, he saw that I always missed the point, Harry hated anything in which he might be made to look a fool, and my mother would remain stony-faced on principle. Being the one with the sense of humor in our family was about as rewarding as being the one with the sense of humor in Mrs. Thatcher's cabinet. "I remember," I said.

"So he played a game with you. He decided to let Mother go ahead with her little plot, but to arrange an unexpected ending for her."

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Harry put down his beer mug and smiled around. "He was a joker, our dad."

The awful thing was the sense of helplessness. We were wounded birds at the mercy of Harry, the cruel cat. Or perhaps it was my father who was the cat? That thought was to my mother the bitterest thought of all. She had fought my father all her life, and now to find herself, after his death, unexpectedly his powerless victim—that was hard. But what *was* there we could do against that relishing glint in Harry's eyes?

He waited. Like all cruel cats, he played it slow. He ate out a lot, thoroughly enjoyed his new position at the works, and just occasionally made remarks. Like: "Remember, if you try anything against me, you'd have to do away with Mrs. Mottram as well. Then, of course, there's my friend Lippincott. Quite a little bloodbath you'd have to undertake."

These thoughts, I'm sure, had already occurred to my mother. I tried not to discuss anything with her. I preferred not to know. It was bad enough during my father's illness, suspecting.

It was more than a week later, one Saturday at the end of breakfast, that Harry opened fire again.

"I think it's about time you told me your plans."

"Plans?" Mother said.

"Yes, plans. I shall be needing this house. My girl friend will be coming up here in a week or two's time. She'll make a wonderful hostess for the firm—better than it's ever had. She has a touch of class has Sheila. So you two had better be thinking of moving on."

"But I've no mon—"

Harry ignored our mother and turned to me.

"Morrie, I've decided to keep you on as Works Manager. That seems to be what Father intended, and he's right—it's the sort of plodding job you're just about up to. And, after all, I don't think you ever *knew*, did you?" I sat there dumbly. "I don't think Mother would ever have confided in you—not explicitly.

"You may have had your suspicions, though, eh, Morrie? A little idea that something was going on? But as long as nothing was said, nothing that made you even remotely into an accomplice, you were in the clear. But I've decided to keep you on in the job, anyway. *Provided* it's clear that you serve me with the most complete, unquestioning loyalty and carry out the new policies I'm working on to the letter. Loyalty is always important, but when it's family work-

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ing together it's quite vital. I'm not going to tolerate an alternative power base in my own firm. Is that quite clear?"

I nodded miserably. He turned suavely to our mother. "You were saying, Mother?"

"I have no money."

"I believe there is such a thing as National Assistance, or Income Support, or whatever damned name they use these days. Personally, I'm against state charity. It saps initiative. There are plenty of jobs a woman of your age can do—jobs in the service industries, cafeteria jobs, cleaning jobs. Not well paid, of course, or pleasant—but, as the saying goes, beggars can't be choosers."

"I've nowhere to live."

"Haven't you got yourself on the Council list? They probably have a nice little flat in one of the highrises. People don't like living in them, but I'm sure you'd find it perfectly pleasant. It's only a penthouse flat under another name, after all. Or perhaps Morrie would let you live with him for a while. If I know Morrie, he's got a bit of money saved, so he'll certainly be able to walk into a nice little house or flat. You'll have the rest of your lives to talk things over."

The post plopped through the door, and Harry went to fetch it while still talking.

"You notice, Mother, I've said nothing about going to the police. Circular from the RSPB. Now *that's* a charity we can cut out—I rather think I ought to. My own father cut off permanently. I'd be fully justified. But I'm a tender-hearted guy. Didn't know that, did you? Well, I am. I don't say I never *will* go to them—'doubts gnawing in my mind,' that's one of the lines I could take—but for the moment, and depending on your good behavior, I won't go yet."

He chuckled. "I don't think that's what Father would have wanted. I'm sure he expected me to dob you in. But what he didn't realize was that I'd have a sort of fellow-feeling with you. Because if I'd still been here, I'd have done exactly the same as you. Maybe we'd have been partners, you and me, Mother. Morrie's a born sitter-out, but I'm a doer. Maybe we'd have sat here and planned it all together. So though I may be going against his wishes—"

He talked on, loving it. I was still sitting at the table. Suddenly my eye caught the envelope. I started to say, "But this isn't a circular," but bit it back. The letter was individually addressed, and to Henry McAtee. A sudden conviction concerning my father's sense of humor washed through me. Feverishly, I picked it up and opened

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it. It was on the notepaper of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

"Dear Mr. McAtee," it read. "In accordance with your father's instructions in the covering letter, we have waited for a fortnight after his funeral before opening the will he sent us. As you will see from the enclosed copy—"

I was glad that at last I had managed to see one of my father's jokes.

DETECTIVERSE

IN-SIGHT JOB

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

Sing a song of sixpence,
The bank was full of dough.
At four-twenty, burglars
Sneaked in on tiptoe.
When the vault was opened,
They were quite surprised—
Their entire operation
Had been televised.

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a *NEW* short story by

HUGH PENTECOST

This new story, as narrated by Lakewood Journal *reporter Phil Philbrick, represents Hugh Pentecost's one hundred and eleventh contribution to EQMM. His first, "Challenge to the Reader," appeared in the May 1947 issue! Remarkable. We owe you, Mr. P. . . .*

AN EASY MURDER

by HUGH PENTECOST

It may look like hindsight when I say that a careless routine in the town of Lakewood led to a terrible tragedy. The schedule had been going on for six or seven years and no one had suggested there was anything careless about it. It worked—or had worked—until last Friday.

In the town of Lakewood, the heart of its business area is the Kroeger Company factory, which manufactures parts for both electric and steam railroad engines. They sell their products all over the country and the demand for what they produce is so great that they operate the factory in three shifts: 9:00 to 5:00 in the daytime, and two night shifts—5:00 P.M. to 1:00 A.M. and one in the morning till 9:00 A.M.

The routine I refer to involved Sam Watson, foreman of the second night shift. He went to the bank before it closed on Friday afternoons and drew out the payroll money for the two night shifts. He took it to his home, which was just a block away from the factory, and deposited it in a wall safe in his bedroom. When he went to work at midnight, he took it with him, and the workers on both night shifts were paid—those going off duty and those just coming on. No problem, as I say, for six or seven years.

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There was another routine that night that didn't relate to Kroeger Company. Every Friday after Sam Watson had gotten the money and deposited it in the wall safe in his house, he and his family went to an early-evening movie. They would get home about nine-thirty. This last Friday, Sam, his wife Sally, and their two small daughters, Julie and Carol, had gone to the movie as usual. But when they got there they discovered that, on a recent vacation to visit Sam's mother in Chicago, they had gone to the movies and seen this same film. They hadn't remembered the title when they saw it on the marquee, but inside, when they realized they had already seen it and hadn't liked it very much, they decided not to watch it again.

The Watsons, like a large portion of the work force at Kroeger's, particularly on the two night shifts, were black. When Kroeger had settled in Lakewood, there hadn't been enough manpower available to produce the staff they needed, and they had brought in blacks from outside the area.

About ten o'clock that Friday night, someone saw smoke pouring out of a cottage near the factory, then flames blazing at the roof level. Firemen arrived, and after a lengthy battle were able to enter the house. There they found the four charred bodies of Sam, Sally, Julie, and Carol Watson. It wasn't until the medical examiner handled the remains that it was revealed that fire hadn't killed the Watsons. Each had been shot lethally by some kind of high-powered handgun. The fire had been set to destroy the bodies so that the cause of death wouldn't be discovered. But the firemen had been a shade too quick for the killer.

It was also discovered that Sam Watson's wall safe had been smashed open and the Friday payroll was gone. The wrong movie had gotten the Watsons home too early.

My name is James Philbrick. In a time when everyone calls everybody by their first name, there turned out to be too many Jims and Jimmys around for me to inherit my own first name, so Lakewood decided to call me Phil. I've lived here all my life and I work now as a reporter for the *Lakewood Journal*. That will explain why I stayed so close to the Watson horror from start to finish.

There was another tragic violence at the Kroeger factory a couple of years ago. A young man named Jebediah Sims, a high-school football star, enlisted in the Marines and went to fight in Vietnam. The war over, Jeb came home to a hero's welcome. The white community of Lakewood staged a celebration for him on the village

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green. No blacks attended—or, I suspect, were invited. Jeb was famous for his prejudice against blacks.

The Kroeger Company decided to reward this young hero by offering him the job of security chief at the factory. I know I wasn't alone in questioning their judgment. Two-thirds of Kroeger's work force was black. But he took the job.

One night, during the first night shift, a fight broke out. It was later reported to have been an argument over a woman. Two black men started to have at each other, and friends joined in, some on one side and some on the other. It turned into a giant brawl. Jeb Sims, in his cottage across the street, heard the uproar and ran to the factory, where he found himself in the center of a madhouse.

He tried to force his way into the center of it, shouting orders, when someone took a swing at him with an outsized monkey wrench, struck him across the eyes with it, and he went down, unconscious.

When he woke up at the hospital, he was blind. The Kroeger Company hired one of the top eye surgeons in the country to try to repair the damage. There was an operation, and when Jeb came to he was still blind. The doctor was puzzled—defensive?—and expressed hope that in time Jeb might get back his sight, but he never has. The Kroeger Company hired a new security chief but, obviously feeling responsible, let Jeb live on in the cottage, opened the factory food center which was reserved only for Kroeger workers to him, and provided him with taped music and perpetual medical supervision.

In the summer, Jeb sat on his front porch, his black glasses staring at the factory. The morning shift, almost all white workers, passed his place, and dozens of them stopped to say hello. He was more than ever a local hero.

Jeb had been inside his cottage when he'd heard the fire sirens that signaled something was wrong at the factory. He'd gone out on the porch, shouting at anyone who ran past to tell him what was happening, where the fire was. When it was over and the tragic facts became known, Jeb was one of the first the police questioned. He knew everyone who worked in the factory, white and black. Could he suggest anyone who might have had it in for the Watsons?

Jeb wasn't much help. The facts indicated that the motive for the crime was the payroll, and the Watsons coming home early was the cause of the violence, not some kind of personal grudge. The villain, whoever he was, had gone there to steal the payroll money, not to attack the Watsons . . .

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That was where things stood when I checked in at police headquarters the morning after the murders. Police Chief Luke Taylor was there with a black man I didn't know by sight. He was introduced to me as Sergeant Jerry Gates of the State Police—a tall, handsome man with a pleasant, unaccented speaking voice. "Sergeant Gates would like to talk to Jeb Sims," Taylor said, "but I don't think he'll gain anything by talking to him." He turned to Gates. "You'll only have your feathers ruffled if he guesses you're black."

"How do you think he'll guess if he can't see?"

The chief shrugged. "His hatred for blacks is very deep-rooted. After all, it was a black man who blinded him."

"I've never been in Lakewood before today," Gates said. "He'd have to know I had nothing to do with what happened to him."

"It's your ballgame, Gates," the chief said. "If Phil is willing to go with you, he may be able to help—with questions you might not know enough to ask."

"*Are* you willing, Mr. Philbrick?" Gates asked. I was.

We drove from Luke Taylor's office to the Kroeger Company in Gates' car. I wondered out loud why the State Police were involved.

"The Lakewood Bank is a state bank," he said.

"Don't you think the way the Kroeger payroll has been handled was a little casual?"

"Perhaps," Gates said. "But not as casual as it appeared on the surface. You may not know it, but four or five people who live between the bank and the Watsons' house were paid a small fee to watch his Friday-afternoon walk with the money from the bank to his home. If he'd been attacked on the street, an alarm would have been sounded. When he got the money home, it was in his safe. It was as secure there as it would have been in the office safe—perhaps safer, if the thief was among the working staff. Watson had proved over the years that he could be trusted."

We arrived at the Kroeger factory and parked across the street from the cottage that had been given to Jeb Sims. He was sitting on the front steps, the early-morning sun glittering off the dark glasses he wore to shield his sightless eyes. I called out to him. "Jeb—it's Phil Philbrick. Can I talk with you?"

He beckoned to me, and as Gates and I approached he said, "I've been wondering why I hadn't seen you, Phil. I'm supposed to know everything about everything that goes on in this town."

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"I've brought someone else who wants to talk with you about the Watson case," I said. "Sergeant Gates of the State Police."

"Mr. Sims," Gates said.

Sims' face hardened. "I don't know anything about what happened in the Watson case."

"But you must have theories about it," Gates said. "After all, you were once security chief at Kroeger's."

"Anybody can make guesses," Jeb said.

"How long were you chief of security?" Gates asked.

"About a year before I was blinded by a black goon," Sims said.

"So you were familiar with the Watson routine?" Gates asked.

"Of course. Watson was watched walking from the bank to his house. When he got there and had the money in the safe, he was supposed to call me, here or in the factory office, to let me know everything was okay."

"And when he went to the movies later?"

"He locked his house. There was an alarm there if anyone tried to force their way in. The money was safe as a church."

"But it wasn't," Gates said. "Someone knew about that alarm system and was able to silence it. That someone was in the house when the Watsons came home early from the movies last night. You'd have to guess it was someone who knew the whole schedule."

"Who didn't?" Sims asked. "Eighty men on the two night shifts got paid on Friday night. That's almost eighty blacks. And the day shift knew about it, too. It was no secret."

"So there are over a hundred and twenty suspects," Gates said. "Three shifts of forty men each."

"Plus the office staff," Sims agreed. "But I can tell you one thing, I don't know a single white man who would have killed those two children in cold blood."

"Not if they knew him and could name him in a court trial?"

"Nobody's in jail for what happened to me," Sims said. His smile was bitter. "Is that why they've sent a black cop to investigate this? To make sure one of their brothers doesn't get hooked for murder?"

"How did you know I was black?" Gates asked.

Sims' smile was ugly. "Maybe it's because of how you smell, or perhaps the way you speak—that nigger drawl."

I felt a profound shock. I'd ridden next to Gates coming here—he didn't smell of anything except a good after-shave lotion and there was no drawl to his speech at all. I wondered how he'd react to these

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insults—then I saw. He had drawn a gun from his holster and was aiming it straight at Sims.

Sims turned his head my way. "Phil, tell your friend to put away his gun. If he uses it on me, he'll have to use it on you. You'll become an eyewitness to a murder."

I opened my mouth to speak, but it had become too dry for me to make a sound. Gates stood very still for a moment and then lowered his gun and put it back in his holster.

"Let's go," he said to me.

I turned toward the car, but Gates headed straight for the door to the house. Sims was amazingly quick. He jumped up and blocked the way. "Where the hell do you think you're going, nigger?" he asked.

"Into your house to look for the gun and the payroll money," Gates said.

"You have to be kidding—"

"You're no more blind than I am, Sims," Gates said. "You knew I was black because you can see me. You knew I'd drawn a gun on you because you could see it. I hadn't threatened you with it and Philbrick didn't say anything. You knew I was headed for this door because you can see me. Your game of blindman's bluff is over.

"You were a Marine, skilled in the use of firearms. That's how you were able to shoot the Watsons dead, one bullet apiece. You could see them, and you had the skill."

And then Gates was looking at a gun, aimed straight at him, Sims had produced from his coat pocket.

"Well, we won't have to look for the gun, will we?" Gates said. "Philbrick, persuade your friend to put away his gun or he'll have to use it on you."

"You black bastard!" Sims said.

Gates' move was so fast I can hardly describe it. He lashed out with a kick, Sims staggered, and Gates was on him. He wrenched away the gun and, seconds later, handcuffs clicked into place on Sims' wrists. Gates, not breathing hard, yanked Sims up to his feet.

"You kept on pretending to be blind because otherwise you'd lose a free house, free meals, and free medical attention. But with the payroll money, you'd be able to make it on your own for a while. You hate blacks so much that murdering the Watsons was easy."

He gestured toward the phone. "Call Chief Taylor, Phil. Tell him we have his murderer for him."

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a reprint especially for cat lovers by

LILIAN JACKSON BRAUN

"Do you think Percy will object to Bill?" Margaret asked Cornelius. "He's a rather boisterous character."

At the sound of his name, Percy raised his head. Cornelius beamed a brotherly smile at the silver tabby. "Percy, the gentleman you are about to meet is an excellent client of mine, and we shall all endeavor to tolerate his bombast for thirty-six hours."

Percy squeezed his eyes in casual consent, but when the Diddletons arrived, shouting and squealing and creating a general uproar, he retired to the balcony where he could observe from a discreet distance.

Hardcover titles by Lilian Jackson Braun, just published or forthcoming from Berkley/Jove, are The Cat Who Went Underground *(March 1989),* The Cat Who Talked to Ghosts *(September 1989), and* The Cat Who Knew a Cardinal *(March 1990). These in addition to nine originals or reprints from the same house by the same author published between April 1986 and September 1988 . . . !*

WEEKEND OF THE BIG PUDDLE

by LILIAN JACKSON BRAUN

Ghosts were no novelty to Percy. In England, his birthplace, they had them all the time. But British ghosts had always shown their good breeding; the uncouth pair that turned up at Percy's summer residence in Michigan left him outraged and chagrined.

Percy was a comfortable, middle-aged bachelor with quiet tastes

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and fastidious habits, who distributed his contempt equally among small children, yipping dogs, and noisy adults. His own manners were impeccable, his reputation blameless. In fact, Percy would have been considered somewhat stuffy had he been a man. Being a cat, he was admired for his good behavior.

He was a portly silver tabby with a grey-and-black coat patterned as precisely as a butterfly's wing. Something about his strong, fierce face gave an impression of integrity, rather like a benevolent man-eating tiger.

Percy spent summer weekends at a rustic chalet in the north woods—on the shore of the exclusive Big Pine Lake. Here he dozed away the hours in the company of Cornelius and Margaret or stared unblinking at the placid lake.

Cornelius was a comfortable, middle-aged attorney with equally quiet tastes. He, too, was portly and had Percy's look of integrity. On weekends, Cornelius worked jigsaw puzzles, took untaxing strolls with his wife, or went through the motions of fishing. Margaret knitted sweaters or puttered lovingly in the push-button kitchen. When they entertained, their guests were calm, temperate, and middle-aged, with no great desire to exert themselves. Everything was quite civilized and dull—the way Percy liked it—until the weekend of the big puddle.

Bill Diddleton and his wife had been invited to spend Saturday and Sunday at the chalet. The bar was stocked with the expensive brands that Cornelius took pride in serving, and the refrigerator contained Margaret's specialities: shrimp bisque, veal in aspic, and blueberry buckle. Her chief delight was the feeding of guests; for Cornelius, the greatest pleasure came when he tied on a chef's apron and broiled the steaks that he ordered from Texas.

"I wonder what Bill's new wife will be like," Margaret murmured over her knitting as they awaited the arrival of the Diddletons. "I hope she appreciates good food."

"A piece of this puzzle is missing," said Cornelius, frowning at a jigsaw version of the Mona Lisa.

"It's under your left foot, dear. Do you think Percy will object to Bill? He's a rather boisterous character."

At the sound of his name, Percy raised his head. He noticed the ball of yarn unwinding, but it failed to tempt him. He never disturbed Margaret's knitting or Cornelius's jigsaw puzzles.

The man beamed a brotherly smile at the silver tabby. "Percy, the

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gentleman you are about to meet is an excellent client of mine, and we shall all endeavor to tolerate his bombast for thirty-six hours."

Percy squeezed his eyes in casual consent, but when the Diddletons arrived, shouting and squealing and creating a general uproar, he retired to the balcony where he could observe from a discreet distance.

The woman, small and nervous, spoke in a shrill voice, and Percy put her in the classification with small yipping dogs. Nevertheless, he stared in fascination at her jewelry, which flashed in the shafts of sunlight slanting into the chalet. The man was muscular, arrogant, and active, like some of the boxer dogs Percy had encountered. The silver tabby had strong opinions about that particular breed.

Upon entering the chalet, Bill Diddleton caught sight of a horizontal beam spanning the living room, and he jumped up and hand-walked the length of it. The irregularity of this conduct made Percy squirm uncomfortably.

"Well, well!" said Cornelius in his best genial tone. "After that exhibition of athletic prowess, I daresay you're ready for a drink, my boy. And what is Mrs. Diddleton's pleasure, may I ask?"

"Call me Deedee," she said.

"Indeed! So I shall. Now, might I offer you a fine eighteen-year-old Scotch?"

"I've got a better idea," said Bill. "Just show me the bar and I'll mix you a drink you'll never forget. Got any tomato juice?"

"Bill's famous for this cute drink," said his wife. "It's tomato juice, ginger ale, Scotch, and—" Rolling her eyes upward to recollect the fourth ingredient, she shrieked. A disembodied head with staring eyes was wedged between the balusters of the balcony railing.

"That's only our Percy," Margaret explained. "He's not as menacing as he looks."

"A cat! I can't stand cats!"

Percy sensed that the weekend was beginning poorly, and he was right.

For lunch Margaret had planned a lobster souffle, to be followed by her special salad that she prepared at the table, basking in the flattering comments of guests. On this occasion, Bill Diddleton insisted, however, on presiding at the salad bowl. "You sit down and take it easy, Meg honey," he said, "and I'll show you how the experts toss greens."

"Isn't it wonderful the way Bill takes over?" Deedee said. "He's

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a wonderful cook. He made one of his wonderful cakes for this weekend."

"I call it a Lucky Seven torte," Bill said. "Seven layers, with seven different kinds of booze. It has to ripen twenty-four hours before we can eat it. —What's the matter, Meg? Afraid of a few calories?"

"Not at all," said Margaret lightly. "It's just that I had planned—"

"Now let's get this straight, honey. I don't want you folks going to a lot of trouble. It was great of you to invite us up here, and we want to do some of the work."

"Bill is so good-hearted," Deedee whispered to Margaret.

"And that's not all, folks. I've brought four fantastic steaks, and tonight I'll show you how to grill good beef."

"Indeed! Well, well," said Cornelius, abashed and searching for a change of subject. "By the way, do you people like old cemeteries? There's an abandoned graveyard back in the woods that's rich in history. The tombstones," he explained, picking up speed, "bear the names of old lumberjacks. At one time this was the finest lumbering country in the Midwest. There were fifty sawmills in the vicinity, and fifty saloons."

Cornelius was launching his favorite subject, on which he had done considerable research. He told how—when the log drive came down the river in the spring—thousands of loggers, wearing beards and red sashes, stormed the sawdust towns, howling and squirting tobacco juice and drinking everything in sight. The steel calks on their boots, sharp as ice picks, splintered the wooden sidewalks. They punctured stomachs, too, when a fight started. Loggers killed in saloon brawls were either dumped in the lake or, if they had any wages left, given burial in the cemetery. Twelve dollars bought a tombstone, inscription included.

"After the lumbering industry moved west," Cornelius went on, "the sawdust towns were destroyed by fire, but the tombstones can still be seen, with epitaphs referring to smallpox and moosebirds. When a lumberjack was killed—or sluiced, as they used to say—he was said to be reincarnated as a moosebird. Smallpox was a term used to describe a man's body when it had been punctured by steel calks."

Margaret said: "We have two favorite stones—with misspelled inscriptions. Morgan Black was 'slooshed' in 1861 and Pigtail Beebe 'died with his corks on' in that same year."

"Let's go!" Bill shouted. "I've got to see that boneyard. I feel like an old moosebird myself."

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"Is there any poison ivy?" Deedee asked, shrinking into her chair.

"Absolutely none," Margaret reassured her. "We visit the cemetery every weekend."

Percy was glad to see the party leave for their stroll.

They returned all too soon, and it was apparent that the adventure had captured the imagination of Bill Diddleton. "It's a filthy shame to let that cemetery go to pot," he said. "It would be fun to clear out the weeds, straighten the tombstones, and build a rail fence around it. I'd like to spend a week up here and fix it up." A significant silence ensued, but he was not discouraged. "Hey, do any of those boys ever walk? What I mean, do you ever see any ghosts around here?"

His wife protested. "Bill! Don't even suggest it!"

"I'll bet I could go into a trance and get a couple of spirits to pay us a visit tonight." He winked at Cornelius. "How about if I have a try at Morgan Black and Pigtail Beebe?"

They were sitting around the fireplace after dinner. Bill threw his head back, stiffened his body, rolled his eyes, and started to mumble. An unearthly silence descended on the chalet, except for the snapping of logs in the fireplace.

Margaret shivered, and in a moment Deedee screeched: "Stop it! It's too spooky—it makes me nervous!"

Bill jumped up and stirred the fire. "Okay, how about a nightcap? We better hit the sack if we're going fishing at five in the morning. Hey, Meg honey, I'm leaving the Lucky Seven on the bar to ripen overnight. The cat won't get into it, will he?"

"Of course not," Margaret said, and Percy—who had been watching the proceedings with disdain—turned his head away with a shudder.

After the others had retired, he prowled around the chalet in the dark, stretching with a sense of relief. The fire had burned down to a dull glow. It was a peaceful moonless night with nothing beyond the chalet windows but black sky, black lake, and black pine trees.

Percy settled down on the hearth rug and was moistly licking fur in the warmth of the waning fire when a sound in the top of the pines made him pause with his tongue extended. It was like the moaning of the upper branches that gave warning of a storm, yet his whiskers told him this had nothing to do with weather. As he peered at the black windows, a presence came through the glass. It

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came gently and soundlessly. A gust of chilled air reached Percy's damp fur.

The presence that had entered the chalet began to utter a low, painful lament, swirling all the while in a formless mass. Then, as Percy watched with interest, it took shape—a beefy human shape.

Apparitions were nothing new to Percy. As a young cat in England, he had once tried to rub his back against some ghostly ankles and had found nothing there. This one was larger and rougher than the silver tabby had ever seen. As it became more clearly defined, he observed a figure with a beard and a fuzzy cap, a burly jacket, and breeches stuffed into heavy boots. *Click-click-click* went the boots on the polished wood floor.

"Holy Mackinaw!" said a hollow, reverberating voice. "What kind of a shanty would this be?" The apparition looked in wonder at the luxurious hearth rug, the brass ornaments on the fieldstone chimney breast, the glass-topped coffee table with half finished jigsaw puzzle.

Percy settled down comfortably to watch, tucking his legs under his body for warmth. A musty dampness pervaded the room. *Click-click-click* again. He turned his head to see another figure materializing behind him. Though dressed in the same rough clothing, it was smaller than the first, and beardless, and it had a rope of hair hanging down its back.

"Pigtail Beebe!" roared the first apparition in a harsh voice without substance. It was a sound only a cat could hear.

"I'm haywire if it ain't Morgan Black!" exclaimed the other in the same kind of thundering whisper. The two loggers stood staring at each other with legs braced wide apart and arms hanging loose. "I got a thirst fit to drain a swamp," Pigtail complained.

"Me, I got a head as big as an ox," said Morgan, groaning and touching his temples.

"Likely we was both oiled up when we got sluiced. How'd you get yours, you orie-eyed ol' coot?"

"A jumped-up brawl in the Red Keg Saloon." Morgan sat down wearily on the pine woodbox, removing his head and resting it on his lap, the better to massage his temples.

Pigtail said with a ghostly chuckle: "They got me on the Sawdust Flats. I'd had me a few drinks of Eagle Sweat and was on the way to Sadie Lou's to get m'teeth fixed, as the sayin' goes, when along come this bandy-legged Blue Noser, and I give him a squirt o' B&L Black right in the eye. 'Fore I knowed it, seven o' them Blue Nosers come at me. When they got through puttin' their boots to m'hide,

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I had the best case o' smallpox you ever did see. Never *did* get to Sadie Lou's."

"That was in 'sixty-one," said Morgan's head noiselessly. "Good drive on the river that spring."

"An' I was a catty man on the logs. I could ride a soap bubble to shore, I could."

"Still braggin'."

Pigtail sat down cautiously in Cornelius's deep-cushioned leather chair. "Holy Mackinaw! This shanty is sure-thing candyside!" The logger began to sing in an eerie whine. "Oh, our logs was piled up mountain high, and our cots was on the snow—in that godforsaken countree-e-e of Michigan-eye-o!"

"Pipe down," said Morgan. "My head's aimin' to go off like dynamite."

"You think you're bad off? I got a thirst that'd dry up the Titta-bawassee River. I could chaw an ear off the tin-plated fool what called us back! Why couldn't they leave us be?"

Morgan carefully fitted his head back on his shoulders. "It's nigh to daylight. We'll be goin' soon."

"No sense goin' without leavin' a sign," said Pigtail. "I'm feelin' stakey. Yahow!" he yelled in a ghostly facsimile of a logger's howl as he upended the coffee table and pulled the needles out of Margaret's knitting. Percy cringed in horror.

Then the logger began to swagger around the room. *Click-click-click* went his calks, although they left no mark on the polished wood floor. "What's this jigamaree?" he said, as he pushed the seven-layer torte off the bar. It landed on the floorboards with a sickening splash. "Yahow-w-w!"

There was a distant echo as a rooster at one of the inland farms announced the break of day.

"Pipe down, you furriner!" Morgan warned, getting up from the woodbox with clenched fists. "You aimin' to split m'head open? If I could get holt o' you, I'd—"

"Hit the gut-hammer!" Pigtail sang out. "It's daylight in the swamp!"

Morgan Black lunged at him, and the two figures blended in a hazy blur.

"Da-a-aylight in the swamp!" was the last fading cry Percy heard as the cock crowed again. The blur was melting around the edges. It wilted and shrank until nothing was left but a puddle on the

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polished wood floor. Then all was quiet except for the swish of waves on the shore and the first waking peeps of the sandpipers.

Thankful that the raucous visitors had gone, Percy curled on the hearth rug with one foreleg thrown over his ears and slept.

He was waked by a voice bellowing in consternation.

"It's a rotten shame!" Bill Diddleton roared, pacing back and forth in his fishing clothes. "It's a filthy rotten shame!"

"I fail to understand it," Cornelius kept repeating. "He's never been guilty of any mischief of this sort."

"It took me three hours to make that cake—with eighteen eggs and seven kinds of booze!"

The disturbance brought the two women sleepily to the balcony railing.

"Look at my torte!" Bill shouted up at them. "That blasted cat knocked it on the floor."

Margaret groped her way downstairs. "I can't believe Percy would do such a thing. Where is he?" Percy—aghast at Bill's accusation—sensed it might be wise to disappear.

"There he goes!" Bill shouted. "Sneaky devil just ran under the couch."

Then Margaret cried out in shocked surprise. "Look at my knitting! He pulled the needles out! Percy, you are a *bad cat!*"

Percy laid his ears back in hopeless indignation, alone in the dark under the sofa.

"It is quite unlike him," said Cornelius. "I fail to understand what could have prompted such— Margaret! My jigsaw puzzle's been swept off the table! That cat must have gone berserk!"

Now Deedee was coming slowly downstairs. "Do you know the floor's all wet? There's a big puddle in the middle of the room."

"I can guess what *that* is!" said Bill, looking cynical and vindictive.

"Percy!" shouted Margaret and Cornelius in unison. "What have you done?"

Recoiling at the unjust accusation, Percy shrank into his smallest size. He was a fastidious cat who observed the formalities of the litterbox with never a lapse.

Margaret circled the puddle. "Somehow I can't believe that Percy would do such a thing."

"Who else would leave a puddle on the floor?" said Bill with a cutting edge to his voice. "A ghost?"

"Ghosts!" cried Deedee. "I knew it! It was that crazy stunt of yours,

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Bill!" She peered into an oversize brandy snifter on the bar. "Where's my diamond ring? I put it in this big glass thing when I helped Margaret in the kitchen last night. Oh, Bill, something horrible happened here. I feel all cold and clammy, and I can smell something weird and musty. Let's go home. Please!"

Bill stood there scratching his right ankle with his left foot. "We'd better get back to the city, folks, before she cracks up."

"Let me prepare breakfast," Margaret said. "Then we'll all feel better."

"I don't want breakfast," Deedee wailed in misery. "I just want to go home. I've got some kind of rash on my ankles and it's driving me nuts!" She displayed some streaks of white blisters.

"That's ivy poisoning, kiddo," Bill said. "I think I've got the same thing."

"It couldn't be," Margaret protested. "We've never seen any poison ivy at the cemetery!"

The Diddletons packed hastily and drove away from Big Pine Lake before the sun had risen above the treetops.

Percy, his pride wounded, refused to leave his refuge under the sofa, even to eat breakfast, and for some time following the weekend of the big puddle he remained cool toward Cornelius and Margaret. Although they quickly forgave him for all the untoward happenings, he found scant comfort in forgiveness for sins he had not committed. The incident was related to a new houseful of guests each weekend, and the blow to Percy's reputation caused him deep suffering.

At the end of the season, Deedee's diamond ring was found behind the pine woodbox. The Diddletons paid no more visits to the chalet, however. Nor did Cornelius and Margaret return to the loggers' graves—almost overnight the entire cemetery became choked with poisonous vines.

"Very strange," said Margaret. "We've never before seen any poison ivy there!"

"I fail to understand it," said Cornelius.

"Q"

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a ***NEW*** **short story by**

ROBERT TWOHY

Sloat reached the Continental Op off the shelf of paperbacks and sat on the bed, but his finger had strayed and hooked not the Op but William Golding's Lord of the Flies*—not a book to dip into anywhere.* Lord of the Flies *needed time to get you to the mood Golding wanted for his scenes of horror.*

Can reading a book save a life? We've always thought so . . .

SLOAT'S LAST CASE

by ***ROBERT TWOHY***

In the yellow pages under Investigators he was Sloat Confidential, with phone number and a P.O. box. His phone sat on a stack of books in his room in a men's rooming house on Chaney Street in the Inglewood district.

He had a California private investigator's license in a bureau drawer—also a .38, which he rarely carried and had fired only a few times on a public range, not too badly.

Under the bureau in a metal case was a thirty-year-old German camera with four screw-in lenses, got at a thrift store ten years ago for $85.00.

On a Wednesday afternoon in June he was stretched out on the bed, deep in a study of First Manassas. He had about thirty books on the Civil War, most of which he reread a lot.

The phone buzzed, which it hadn't for some days. Putting down the book, he reached for it, stated, "Sloat Confidential."

A woman asked if he took candid photos. "Yes, my fee is eighty a day plus expenses"—his standard opener for a caller to go for, come back under, or hang up.

She went around it. "Do you have a partner, secretary, assistant?" No, he worked alone. "Would you hide in a closet?"

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He had hid in closets. "I'd want to know the details."

"The door has a little hole I made with my nailfile. Could you put your camera to it and get pictures?"

"I can't really say until—"

"Are you straight? I mean sexually."

"Does that figure?"

"Not if you don't resent someone who's not."

"I, uh—no."

"If we work together, I'll pay you three hundred cash down and seven hundred cash when you give me the film."

He didn't say anything. He'd never been offered $300.00 cash down and $700.00 on completion. People with money didn't call Sloat Confidential.

"Hello?"

"Yes, I heard you."

"You don't list an address."

"No. May I ask where you're calling from?"

"A Calley's super on Washington, near downtown."

"Do you want to—I could meet you in a restaurant or somewhere downtown."

"You don't have an office?"

"It's in my house, more or less. I usually meet clients where it's convenient for them."

"Are you married?" No. "Good. I want this completely confidential, which is why your name struck me. Could you meet me here? No problem parking, there are plenty of spaces."

"Calley's on Washington. What's the cross-street?"

"Hold on a sec, I'll find out." The soft thud would be the receiver swinging against the phonebox, after which came vague sounds like around a supermarket.

Swinging his feet to the floor, he hefted Manassas on the bottom shelf among its kind.

Three shelves the width of the room held three hundred or more books, and half that many were in stacks around the room, including under the phone. Civil War, histories, mysteries, true-crime studies, general lore, some classics. Nearly all were from thrift stores or library clearances.

He was forty-two years old, with no wife, family, or close or distant friends. Girls were occasional business pairings. He went to bars only when a bar owner hired him to find out how the bartender was stealing. He was a loner and a reader, who watched his black-white

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TV for news or an occasional great old movie, not much else. He wasn't a sports fan.

He was from Minnesota and thought sometimes of going back, but supposed not. He didn't like L.A., but after fifteen years couldn't think of anyplace he'd feel more at home, or less.

The phone clicked and went dead. He guessed the call had been a joke, hung up, stretched for Manassas. Getting comfortable, he turned to where she'd cut him off, and the phone buzzed.

"Sloat Confidential."

"Me again. Somebody got it, I'm on another phone. —The cross-street is Mallory."

He said he could be there in half an hour. She explained a string of shops was to the right of the market, the second being a bakeshop, Ninny's. "I'll be in front. I'm in a brown jacket and grey slacks and have brown hair with a green scarf, brown sunglasses. What do you look like?"

"Sort of tall, light tan jacket, brown hair."

"Right. 'Bye." She hung up.

After a few seconds he said, "'Bye," hung up, and reracked the book.

Making the turn to the bathroom, he almost mowed down the decayed diplomat who had just come out, and they mumbled as they jockeyed around each other. Sloat had lived in the back room on the second floor three years. He ran into the diplomat who had the front, or the young factory type in the middle, only by unlucky chance, nobody ever saying anything. Same for the three lives on the first floor. The building was ancient, with high ceilings and solid walls, and in his room he rarely heard anything except his own TV, when on, or sounds from the street behind. The other roomers might be men in hiding. He wasn't in hiding, unless from himself.

Clean, combed, and jacketed, he walked a block to his twelve-year-old red Pinto wagon and was shortly northbound on Crenshaw, which hits Washington Boulevard, wondering if this ride was an extension of her joke. He might prowl around Ninny's while, parked nearby, she and friends would be snickering.

Plenty of spaces was true. Laying the Pinto in one, he ambled right and, in front of the second shop in the string, spotted a dark-brown jacket, green scarf, and big, round brown shades. Hands in pockets, she watched him approach.

As he neared, she skipped left, then past him fast, shooting a

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green glance in profile that he read as an invitation to follow at a distance.

Halfway along a row, she slid behind the wheel of a late-model, off-white Toyota. Strolling up, he got a nod and a move of a hand that said he should proceed around and in beside her.

She was turned his way. Throwing a glance around, she stripped off the shades, showing clear green eyes in a round face with brisk nose, firm lips, clear complexion, no makeup. Tufts of hair around the edges of the scarf were light brown. He guessed she was about thirty.

"Ann Miles."

He said, "Jim Sloat."

From a pocket, she pulled a thin swatch of new-looking bills in a paper clip, the top one a twenty. Laying it at her right hip, she gazed at him in a sizing-up way. He tried to look competent and broad-minded.

"This would be in somebody else's house. I have permission to go in when they're not there." Her voice was cool and to the point. "They're neighbors. He's a high-school math teacher, she's a hospital R.N. She's a close friend." Tip of tongue came briefly between lips, ducked back. "It's not a happy marriage. They're both confused, neither knows who they are—I'm speaking sexually."

He put on the look of a detective on top of the L.A. sex scene, occasionally somewhat true.

"She's never had opportunity to find her real self. But that's starting to change. I'm trying to help her without being pushy. I can be pushy, but not in her case. She's a gentle, passive person. I want her to find out on her own who she is. I think she will, given some space."

He didn't say anything.

After a few seconds she added, "Let me put it this way—if I feel an attraction for her, she doesn't know it. We're good friends, but that's as far as it's gone or will, until she finds her real self." She looked off. "I intend what we have together to be meaningful and long-term."

Which sounded soap opera—which didn't make it untrue. The money at her hip was true. Anyway, the top bill.

"I don't want to use real names, so I'll call her Alice, him George." The green gaze was back on him. "He's home from school about four, she not until six or so. A couple of weeks ago I stopped over to drop

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off a book I'd borrowed. It was about four-thirty and his car was in the drive, but when I rang there was no answer.

"I went to the back yard but didn't see him. Her room is at the far end. The blinds were down. I walked down that way and heard, faintly, old-time dance-band music. A little gap was between the blind and the sill. I got close and peeked in. It was dim, but I saw something light-blue with yellow flowers moving and swaying to the music. She has a gown like that."

He didn't say anything.

"I went home and called the hospital. She came on and I hung up."

She watched him with the clear eyes. He supposed he should clue her that he was following. "So it wasn't her dancing to the music."

"No."

He rubbed his chin. He could guess what she wanted of him, but the case had no shape yet.

"I haven't told her what I saw—we don't talk about personal things. I wouldn't, anyway. She'd feel terrible, that it was all her fault—she's that type person. She doesn't dislike him. I don't, either—they just have no sexual meeting ground."

"You know that?"

"I know that in her bedroom closet are only her clothes. His are in the closet in his study, where there's a couch. Also, that there's bedding in his closet. The bathroom off her bedroom has only her stuff. His is in the hall bathroom."

He asked about children, learned there weren't any.

"Ages?"

"He's about forty-five, she's thirty-seven. They married four years ago. Previously she lived with her mother, who died."

"Are you an R.N., too?"

"No. I was an entertainer." Her lids were lowered. "My second husband left me enough so I can be my real self. He was elderly." Tonguetip took another peek, retreated. "Until I married him, I was my real self privately, but in public I played the standard dating game, which now I don't have to any more." She had a small, chaste smile.

The top twenty was true. He said, "You want photos."

"Yes. You'd be in the bedroom closet."

"You made a hole in the door."

"With my nailfile."

"Why do you want them?"

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"You'd give me the roll of film, I'd snip a piece, take it to him to hold to the light. I'd tell him there are no prints and won't be, and I'll give him the rest of the roll to burn plus two thousand dollars if he agrees to leave her."

"That's your object?"

"Yes. So she'll finally have room to find herself."

"Would you show her the film?"

She frowned. "No. She'd know nothing about it, ever. Or that I arranged for him to leave. If she found out, she'd probably have nothing more to do with me. She wouldn't understand that sometimes you have to do something not very nice to get things to work as they should."

Because a story has a tinny ring doesn't mean it's a lie—real life can ring tinny. "George is supposed to leave her without telling her why?"

"Yes, that would be a condition."

"What would he tell her?"

She shrugged. "That he's bored with marriage, has to get away to find himself. Which is true. She'd be all for it, wish him well."

"So you think."

"No, so I feel. I go by feelings."

"How about his job?"

"No problem. He's a good teacher, and he has tenure. Two thousand would put him in a nice apartment in a near town and there'd be no scandal."

"A near town. You don't live in L.A.?"

"No, upcoast."

He was quiet a minute or so, pondering about a marriage involving no children, each spouse with a good job. Usually people work out a split, or one just takes off. They don't need a scheming rich neighbor.

If George really wanted out, $2,000.00 should be plenty of lever without blackmail photos.

She was watching him close, maybe getting his thoughts. She said, "They're caught in habit and in their moral code and don't know how to break out. People are afraid to look for their real selves, of what they might find." For just a second her eyes got a sort of drifty look, then were cool and steady again. "I'm going to help them—if not with you, with another detective."

"Why not you alone?"

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"Me take the photos, you mean?" She fingered the bridge of her nose. "I considered it. But two people is best."

He wanted more on that but she picked up the stack of money. "Three hundred now, seven hundred when you give me the film."

"Will that be, uh, in writing?"

Firmly: "Nothing in writing. No notes, no receipts." A thumb riffled the money. "I want film, you want this—I trust that if you take it, you'll want seven hundred more."

"Which I should trust you for."

"Oh, yes. If I don't give it to you, you don't give me the film." Flipping the money, she looked the question, which he let hang.

"You have permission to go in their house."

"Yes. Their extra key is under a stone in the back yard. She showed me, I've used it."

"Why does she want you to have access?"

"She's forgetful, literally that. Once or twice nearly every week she goes to work forgetting a paper she needs, a nice lunch she's fixed, a letter to mail—she phones me, I go get what she needs or run the errand."

"Does George know you know about the key?"

"Oh, yes. He likes me all right, we're friendly."

"The day you saw him dancing, did you look under the stone?"

She frowned. "No. Why?"

"I wonder if he was going to dance if he'd leave the key out there."

"No problem. He'd have bolted the door."

"It has a bolt?"

"Yes. I go in only when they're not there and she wants something, or I do—to borrow a book, or a bottle of wine if I have sudden company."

It made enough sense to go on from. "Does he know your feelings about her?"

"Not that I know. I don't think he'd be bothered if we had an affair as long as word didn't get around school—he'd hate kids laughing about him."

Sloat flashed on a student finding in a bush a print of George in drag dancing by himself, the kid showing it around, a classroom of giggling kids, George in shock. Her gaze searched him. "What are you thinking?"

It hit him in a swoop how he could do the job, get the payoff, and be sure of no prints. He said, "Detail the closet."

She held him the money. He took it, folded it around the clip,

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shoved it in his breast pocket. She sat back, folded her arms, and detailed the closet. He asked some questions, got the picture. Two sliding doors—on the left one a full-length mirror. When opened, it slid over the right door, which was thin plywood with various nicks and gouges. She'd worked a hole in a gouge which, unless straight-on, looked like all the other gouges. It was nose level to her and a foot or so from the left side of the door.

Behind the mirror door were Alice's gowns, nightgowns, undergarments, and other feminine stuff, including two wigs, on shelves. Behind the door with the hole were coats, jackets, sweaters, and, on shelves, folded nurse uniforms and blankets—not much for a fantasist. Having got from behind the mirror door the trappings he wanted, George would slide it shut, the blinds would be pulled, the radio turned to the station that played old ballroom melodies, and he would dance in front of the mirror.

"I'm to his right as he faces the mirror."

"Yes. Can you get him from there?"

He nodded. "With a wide-angle lens."

"Do you have that?"

"Yes." With George on the move, he'd set the speed at 1/125th. "What's he like?"

"About my height, little round tummy. A neat, soft, mincy little man, not rough or violent."

"What if he opened my door?"

Her eyebrows went up. "I don't know why he would." She spread a hand. "He'd see you, I guess, and probably pass out. Then you could step over him and be gone." Her smile was crooked.

He was quiet. She said with no smile, "If you don't want to do it, give me the money. I'll give you twenty for your time and get someone else."

Stepping out your door, you're running a risk, particularly in L.A. This wouldn't be in L.A. He'd hidden in closets for much less than $1,000, taking a chance something would go wrong, he'd be spotted. He never had been.

"Does he have a gun?"

"No—that would be totally out of character."

"Say everything goes all right, he does his dance—how do I get out of there?"

"That's why two people are needed." She sat with sandaled feet tucked in, hands folded on her knees, looking like a neat and proper young person. "Let me start from where we'll begin, which will be

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tomorrow. About one in the afternoon, I'll be in front of, say, the drugstore—the end store there." She pointed straight ahead on the diagonal at a drugstore sign showing over rows of parked cars. "Pick me up, drive me to my car, which will be in the lot, and we'll go from there."

"Where?"

"I won't say yet. You may want to check up on me. You could have a friend in my town—you call him, he happens to know me, word gets around. I want no word, no prints, just you and me knowing—later George. Nobody else, nobody talking before or after."

He let slide the fact that whatever her town, he didn't have a friend there. She went on. "We each drive our car to my town. I point out my house two blocks from theirs, then we go to theirs. I take you in, you look things over. Did I mention there's a phone in her bedroom?"

She hadn't.

"Also one in the kitchen and in his den. Okay, I leave you then and drive downtown, put my car into the Exxon near the high school to be washed and gassed, walk to school to the faculty parking lot, and wait near his car. He comes out about quarter to four. I tell him my car started acting up, I got it to the station, will he drive me home? Of course he does. I run in, ring twice. You get in the closet. If we're lucky, he comes in the bedroom and dances."

"If we're lucky."

She said crisply, "Let me finish. About four-thirty I call, tell him the station called and my car's ready, can he drive me down? He has no reason not. He leaves and you're safe to walk out the back gate to my place. The door will be unlocked. You come in, I come home, I give you seven hundred cash, and you give me the film." She leaned back and nodded that he had the floor.

He said, "No guarantee he'll dance tomorrow."

"None."

"So?"

"So I give you fifty cash for a nice beach motel and a hundred dollars on the seven hundred, and we try again Friday."

"Same routine, your car acts up?"

She frowned. "Of course not. I have another story which there's no need to go into now—" She looked at her watch.

He asked, "What if Friday's a blank, too?"

She closed her eyes briefly. "Then I'll concede that it's not to be

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and drop it." He opened his mouth, but she held up a hand. "I'll give you half for a good try—say, four hundred."

"How far is your town?"

"Something over an hour."

That seemed to be it. He reached for the door handle, put a foot out. She said, "Tell me when and where tomorrow." He told her. She nodded.

He walked half a dozen steps, turned to cut across rows to the Pinto, and glanced back. The Toyota had backed loose and was gone.

He had three hundred dollars in his pocket, if real, and a number of possible lies to sort through.

Sleaze cases came to him, he didn't go looking for them. Some he turned down and some he took, depending on his financial condition at the moment. The moment she called, his condition was a ten, two fives, and four ones in his wallet, $58.00 in his checking account, and rent due in two weeks. If by Monday he'd gotten no calls and nothing was in his P.O. box as usual, he'd have hied to the temp agency, where usually he got quick placement as cleanup man, checker, mover's helper, or whatever. Most jobs were brief, some stretched out. Always he returned to Sloat Confidential.

In thirteen years as a fringe detective in L.A., he'd never got the big case that would get his name in the *Times* and bring clients with money. But he hated to give up his dream of fat fees, some prestige, and a nice office in a good district with just his name, James Sloat, discreetly on the door. Sloat Confidential was to catch the eye of people wanting to save a buck—better than no people, which he'd got when he listed as Sloat, James. Discreet is for when you can afford to be.

She had said people can get stuck in their habits and moral codes.

Also in sleaze.

He was in his room, jacket on hanger, shoes off, stalking around. One of her twenties had gone for a pretty good steak dinner and fourteen were stacked on the desk. They were genuine even if a lot of what she'd told him might not be.

She might be as hetero as he had a strong feeling she was, with a yearning for George, not Alice. Say George wasn't soft and mincy but a good-looking stud whose little kink of private drag-dancing was no indicator of sexual confusion. He knows who he is and Ann wants him off on his own so she can get at him.

Or? Or they'd already had an affair, which got too hot so he cooled

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it, which turned her vengeful. She'd get a fringe detective and feed him a line that made a degree of sense, counting on him to go for the money. What she wants is film to turn into prints, which she'll drop around George's school for the kids to find—she wants to ruin him.

Or everything she had said was as true as the money.

Sloat sat at the desk and fiddled with how to work the case so there'd be no prints afterward.

Tomorrow George dances. Or Friday. Sloat takes Ann the film, she produces seven or eight hundred in nice new C-notes, and he tells her, "Now we go see George."

She squeaks that that wasn't the deal. He says, *I'm* dealing now, she'll play his game from here on or no film. If she squawks, argues, throws more money at him, he'll be pretty sure her aim is prints to destroy George, for whatever reason.

He pictured himself peeling $200.00 from the wad—if Friday, $300.00?—laying the rest on a chair or whatever, getting out his lighter and drawling, "Better bring a bowl or something so the rug don't get burnt," and firing the film.

Sloat smiled, wondering what old crime movie the scene was lifted from. It was okay but could use a walkoff line—

At the door he turns, growls Bogishly, little lip-twitch, "Oh, by the way—I'm gonna send George an anonymous note, tell him next time he dances, be sure to check the closet for stray detectives with cameras."

Which was labored, but Bogey could pull it off. Sloat couldn't, but she'd get the gist.

He frowned, fiddled with the money. Would he do that—burn the film, return the cash, warn George? Yes. Because when the case was over, he wanted no prints floating around. He'd do sleaze, but within limits.

Another ending. He deals, she shrugs, and they go to George. She introduces him some way, George asks them in, she lays out her deal. If everything's as she's said, and George goes for it, Sloat gives her the film, which she hands George and he burns it. Then handshakes all around and that's it, he keeps all the money and there's no need for a walkoff line. Everybody's happy, including Sloat. Sleaze with an upbeat.

Sloat rubbed his face, looked at his watch, and saw it was past midnight. Money was all over the desk. Stacking it, he put it in the drawer, got up, and let his clothes hit the floor.

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He growled, "I'll play your game, then you'll play mine, Shweetheart."

Maybe George wouldn't dance. Then Sloat would get $400.00 on Friday for no photos—happy ending for him if not her. If she paid.

If not, maybe he'd tell her he'd drop Alice an anonymous note.

He went to bed, feeling fairly at ease with the case.

He got up late. After breakfast at a near place, he drove to the camera store on Euclid for a roll of 35 mm film. Then he got gas.

Back in his room, camera loaded and back in its slot in the case, he put the case by the door and got in the bathroom unseen.

Back in his room again, his watch said it was nearing twelve-fifteen. He was dressed, shaved, combed, eighty dollars from the desk in his wallet, a few minutes to idle.

No time for Manassas. But Hammett's *The Continental Op* he could open to any page and the first six words would recall immediately the action to that point, in whichever of the seven tales he hit, and he'd proceed from there.

The Op was like an album of old and well loved photos, which wherever opened raised a good memory. Hammett was a speed photographer, giving you the action and a line or less of description for each new character or scene, leaving you to fill in details from your own experience or imagination—collaboration in a sense, which is maybe why after sixty-plus years the Op was as lively and full of bounce as each new generation of reader-collaborators.

So thought Sloat, who liked the Op partly because, unlike some fiction sleuths, he didn't brag how he never touched sleaze. Sloat guessed that here and there he did, which was his business, as photographing Dancing George was Sloat's business, and Ann Miles' because she was paying for it. And George's, too, because at the end he'd burn the film if Sloat didn't, if there was film—whatever ending would leave no prints and sleaze under control.

He reached the Op off the shelf of paperbacks and sat on the bed, but his finger had strayed and hooked not the Op but William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*—not a book to dip into anywhere. *Lord of the Flies* needed time to get you to the mood Golding wanted for his scenes of horror.

Flipping a few pages, Sloat paused at the lead-in illustration: a detailed sketch of a bloody pig's head on a stake, dotted with flies, gazing at the viewer with halfmast eyes and a cynical grin—the

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artist's translation of Golding's vision of what's at the core of humanity.

Sloat's watch said it was time to get moving. Laying the book down on the bed, he picked up the camera case, locked his door, took three steps, and faced the diplomat emerging from his room. The diplomat froze. Sloat scuttled left and down the stairs.

She was standing at the far end of the drugstore, in the same garb as yesterday. He pulled to the walkway and she piled in fast. "Drive all the way around." Her voice had a thin edge, so did her lips. He drove around. "Down the third lane," which he took. "Pull up here." Behind the shades, her eyes were brown blurs. "Do you know how to get on Ventura Freeway?" Yes. "Okay, I'll follow." She slid out, slammed the door, marched past the tails of two cars, and dipped into the stack. Seconds later the Toyota backed out.

He tailed it around the lot, jotting down the license for what that was worth. Coming out of the lot, she eased over for him to pass in front.

On the freeway was the usual horde, thinning as they got north. She took over, holding 60.

Sky was sparkly blue. He rolled down the window to get the breeze and one second later a crowd of flies was whipping silently around his face.

Cursing, he gave a right-hand swing and they were gone. He rolled up the window. He was stunned. In a swoop, they'd been all over him, and one swing of his hand they were gone. Like they'd never been there.

He blew a sigh, saw what explained them. They weren't real. They'd come wafting from the pig drawing lying fresh on his mind. He'd imagined them—no, he'd hallucinated them.

Which was a first, and not good. The mind doesn't go all in a whack, but gradually—mental controls give way and you start seeing things that aren't. Like a clump of flies so real that he'd cursed and swung at them.

He opened the window. The Toyota had led him into the low hills. He felt the nice breeze and it brought no flies. He murmured out loud, "Just one of those weird things, don't worry about it." Which he wouldn't unless it happened again and kept happening.

He forgot the flies as he followed the Toyota past six or eight towns and back down near sea level. His watch said 2:16. A sign said that the next three exits were to Oxnard. She took the second

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one, and shortly a left, and they sideroaded Oxnard. She went right, then left, and they were northbound on a wide highway.

To the right on a green hillside were low white buildings that a sign said were Ventura College. A mile farther, she led left across the highway into a shopping complex dominated by a five-story PacBank. She circled a parking area that ran south a few acres, and at the far-end lot put the Toyota into a space with no cars around. He put in on her left.

She waved him to her and he took the camera case, locked the Pinto, and got in beside her.

She didn't say anything and he didn't ask. It was her game for now and if she wasn't going to cue him he'd keep quiet and just follow along. For now. Later would be his game, if George danced.

The road she took became a street in a subdivision of one-story adobe houses on fairly ample lots. After a couple of turns she announced that they were on Lawler Street and she was on the next block, second house left.

It was brown with white trim and a green-slate roof, a thin tree in a swatch of green by the wide driveway. "The front door will be unlocked."

Half along the next block, she right-turned into a paved lane with six-foot redwood fencing separating back yards on both sides. "The black gate there—" gesturing left-handed. Two gates farther came the next street, where she turned close right and stopped at the curb.

"Give me three or four minutes, then come. If anyone's in sight, keep walking and come back when it's clear." She shut her door and, stepping fast, was out of his mirror view and down the lane.

He sat a few minutes, watching a guy down the street push a hand mower. Some kids on bikes wheeled past. Nobody was looking out a window that he saw. It was a neighborhood where people weren't wary on a nice Thursday afternoon—this wasn't L.A. but a low-intensity, reasonable coastal town.

He and his case proceeded up the lane. At the black gate, a glance back gave him no reason to keep walking. Hitting a jigger, he pushed in and the gate swung shut behind him, unpainted on the inside. He was in a moderate back yard fenced at both ends, a peach-colored adobe in front of him.

She stood on a patio by an open glass door. He followed her into a living room, usual furniture. Down a hall past a kitchen on his right were closed doors right and left. A door at the end opened to

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a fair-sized room, pale-green, windows on the yard, dark-green drapes pulled back and old-style tan blinds up. Next to a green-and-white queen-sized bed was a table with a white phone and a white radio. A bathroom gave off. There was a grey bureau and a red chair. Right of the hall door was the closet, with mirror door first and the other closed door.

"See if you can see the hole," she said. Sloat was on the mirror side. He saw seven or eight nicks and gouges in the other door, but no hole.

She put her fingers to a gouge which was just another dark mark until he moved in front of it and saw the hole.

Her shades were off and the eyes were deep-green with a shine.

Setting his case on the bureau, Sloat got out the camera and the wide-angle lens, which he screwed in. She slid the right door open from the far end and he stepped inside the closet, not seeing the hole until he slid the door shut and it came out from behind the mirror door.

He stood among coats, jackets, sweaters in not-quite-darkness, a little light coming through the hole. Placing the lens against it, he hunched, and in the viewfinder had the whole room.

He came out into the room. She asked if she could have a look. He gave her the camera and she went in, shutting the door. "Move left," she said. He did. "Come forward. Farther." He was two feet from the mirror.

"Now I can't see you."

"No, I'm too close."

"Mostly he'll be back, so he can watch himself."

"If he dances."

"Yes, if he dances."

She came out and gave him the camera, which he set on the bureau. He put the case in the closet, far end and back.

She looked at her watch. "It's nearly three." Perching near the head of the bed, she punched phone buttons, said in a toneless voice, "Mr. Randon, please. —No, if he's in class I'll call later." She hit more buttons. "Fourth floor, please. —Mrs. Randon, please. —Oh. No, no message."

She stood up. "She's on her rounds. So all's well. If you use the bathroom, be sure to flush. Don't use the one in the hall, the flusher's erratic." She had moved to the door. "In forty minutes or so, I'll ring twice, meaning he's almost home. Then sometime after four-thirty I'll call him."

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She went. At the window, he saw her moving across the yard and then out, the gate shutting behind her.

Sloat opened the mirror door and saw gowns, including a light-blue one with yellow flowers, and nightgowns on hangers and hooks. Undergear was on shelves—also two wigs on stands, a brown and a silver-blonde.

He wandered around. The bathroom was white with blue trim, fluffy white towels, and in the medicine cabinet women's tubes and jars and so forth. He flushed. No erraticism.

Down the hall, he opened doors on an empty bedroom and one full of old furniture. Left-side doors were to a closet and a bathroom with men's stuff and brown towels. Off the living room was a door to a study with a desk, bookshelves with engineering and math-type books, and an old, comfortable-looking brown couch. In the closet were men's clothes and folded bedding.

So that all she'd told him about the layout of the place was true.

He looked in the wide blue kitchen, wondered what was in the reefer, decided that would be dumb, he might slop something or drop crumbs and not know it. He went back to the bedroom and stood a while, gazing in the mirror at the face of a man deep in sleaze.

At 3:35, the phone rang twice and no more. Grabbing the camera from the bureau, he loped to the far end of the closet and in, sliding the door shut.

A faint clunk could be the front door closing. A minute later came flushing from the hall bathroom—which ended okay, it seemed. Then a while passed with no sound.

Lens to the hole, Sloat looked into the room, seeing no one—then his view went black as light shot in on his right, meaning the mirror door had been slid open. Not far.

Old-style ballroom music broke out, the light, knowing voice of Fred Astaire urging someone to face the music and dance.

Sloat kept the lens in place, not moving or breathing. If Randon stuck his head in and looked to the right, they'd look at each other. Sloat hoped the music blocked out the boom of his heart.

A blue-striped sleeve whipped in the far end and a hand caught a green frock and jockeyed it off its hanger. It floated out.

The sleeve shot back and the silver-blonde wig went.

Then the light coming in on his right clipped off. Hunched at the viewfinder, he saw the room dim with blinds down, but light enough for photos. Randon wasn't there.

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So he was in the bathroom and shortly would appear, wigged and made up, green-frocked, maybe bejeweled, all primed to face the music and dance. Deep in sleaze was Sloat.

Astaire had finished. Another famed voice started pleading "Embraceable You"—as up in the viewfinder popped a pink and bloody pig's head!

With a yell, Sloat fell left as the camera shot from his hands and he heard, over the music and his yell, a sharp cough. Falling, he caught coats and dragged them down. He hugged them as the famed voice begged to embrace him, "sweet embraceable you"—ewe, pig, pig's head with flies—

The cough had sounded a split-second after he fell from the camera, which was ripped from his hands and was back there somewhere. Randon, way out of character, had fired through the hole and would slide open the door to see if he was dead. Randon would dig through coats and find him alive and correct the error. Throwing off all the coats except one, Sloat got his feet under him and was up. As the door slid open, he'd lunge with arms wide and slam into Randon, enfold him in coat, drive a knee into him, fall on him.

Clutching the coat, ready to spread it, he heard his heart and his heavy breathing, which he closed his mouth on. Sinatra finished. A voice tried to sell auto wax. Sloat waited, clutching the coat. A voice he didn't know groaned a song he didn't know, and it took a long time, finally ended. Somebody hustled razor blades, then said it was 4:08. Sloat waited. Bing inquired if he'd like to swing on a star.

Ann Miles had set him up for Randon. Or Randon was fiction that money had made real.

She had called the school and the hospital, but you can say anything on a phone. Either teacher Randon and R.N. Mrs. Randon were fictions or they were real and Sloat was fiction.

Crosby stopped suddenly. The radio had gone off. He heard low voices, which could be Ann Miles and Randon, one with a .22, judging by the sharp cough. Maybe Alice was out there, too—she might be the brains behind the gang. Maybe Ann was Alice, or versa vice. Maybe no one was out there, everyone had gone surfing. Maybe a pig's head on a stake was out there, halfmast eyes, cynical smile. He thought he heard low grunting sounds.

He could put his eye to the hole and immediately get a .22 slug in it. The *Lord of the Flies* had saved him once, but could he keep counting on it?

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A calm voice said clearly, "Whoever's panting should know that three armed police officers are out here."

Sloat cut off the panting too suddenly, and coughed.

"I'm Sergeant Sloan, Ventura Police. And here are the others—"

A hard voice said, "Officer Brady." Then came, "Officer Canfield." They were various directions from Sloan. Randon was a gifted ventriloquist or Ann Miles was, or Alice, or three police officers were out there.

Sloat said, "What do you want me to do?"

Sloan wanted him to stand facing the door with his palms up. The door slid open behind the mirror door and he saw two uniformed cops with guns and a tall, lean man in a grey jacket and tan slacks, good brown shoes, white shirt with red tie, a calm, intelligent face featuring grey eyes.

At the right edge of his view was a small woman in a flowered pink dress who said, "I've never seen him before."

The cop closest to him, wide and hard-looking, matching the voice that had said "Officer Brady," holstered his gun and had Sloat turn to the closet and went over him. In the closet Sloat saw his camera with loops of film trailing out. Behind him, the woman said, "The Kennedys are in Hawaii."

The cop lifted his wallet. The woman said, "She ran out the gate and I knew she was a criminal. I tried to run over her feet, but she jumped around the car and up the lane. I drove right home and called you." Sloat was impressed. His watch said 4:12. Less than fifteen minutes ago his camera had been shot, now here were three cops. The Ventura PD was quick—in this upscale neighborhood, anyway.

Brady had left him. He turned around. The tall plainclothes cop had his wallet—Sergeant Sloan. Just like Sloat except the last letter. He was gazing at a card that would be Sloat's private-investigator's license. He gazed at Sloat and passed the wallet to Brady, who looked at the card and passed it to Canfield, who looked at it and at Sloat.

The little woman saw all the looking and asked eagerly, "Who is he?"

Sergeant Sloan gave Canfield an eyebrow and the officer took her lightly around the shoulder and walked her out.

Sloan asked amiably, "What are you doing here, Mr. Sloat?"

"I, uh—I was on a case."

"Who's the young woman who ran out the back gate?"

"I assume my client."

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Sloan had the wallet back and gave it to Sloat. Brady, at the open closet, bent and got the camera, which trailed loops of film out a jagged hole in the back. The wide-angle lens was shattered. Sloan studied it interestedly, then looked at Sloat, a question. Sloat said, "She shot at me through the door, got the camera."

Sloan raised his eyebrows, walked past him, and slid the door so that the hole came in view, easily visible now, neatly rounded. Sloan put in his fingertip, gazed at it, put it to his nose. Brady had slid the camera and its loops into a plastic bag.

Sloan asked, "Why?"

"I'm not exactly clear."

Canfield reappeared, announced that a window in the bathroom down the hall was broken in reach of the twist gizmo. Sloan asked, "Is that how you got in?"

"No." He told how he had got in and that she'd said she got the key from under a rock in the yard, and later told him not to use that bathroom.

"What was your point in coming here?"

"To photograph him."

"Who?"

"The man she said lived here, George Randon."

"A couple named Kennedy live here."

"I heard. And that they're in Hawaii."

"Who's George Randon?"

"Not George, actually—she said she'd rather not use his real name." He realized that he had a smile that, the way they looked at him, must look weird. It felt weird. He got rid of it. "Randon's not his real name, or his wife Alice. They're both fiction people." His head seemed to be off somewhere while his tongue flopped on its own, nakedly. His legs became nothing and he went down. Canfield got him up and he was going out the door, mostly due to Canfield.

Then he was on a sofa in the living room, feet on the floor, top half of him down. He had an impression he'd been there a while. Sloan's calm voice sounded. "Are you okay now?"

"Sure." He swung up, feeling like a clown but okay, head back where it should be. "I guess I, uh—I've never done that before." He'd never hallucinated or been shot at by a client before, either. It was a different kind of day. "Was I out long?"

"A few minutes." Sloan sat in a thick orange chair and Brady perched on a footstool with notebook and pencil. The glass door to

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the yard was open. Sloat guessed that Ann Miles had run out leaving it like that, and the little lady had brought the cops in through it.

Sloan handed him a glass of water, which he drank half and gave back, guessing Sloan was playing friendly cop, wooing him for information. Sloat had no objection, he could use a little friendliness.

Sloan said, "You want to fill us in on this?"

Sloat gave the main points, from Ann Miles' call yesterday to the present, and Brady made notes.

When he finished, there was quiet a while. Brady got up and went down the hall.

Sloan said, "The Kennedys are Philip and Elaine. He's a retired engineer in his early seventies. She used to be a nurse. They've been gone a couple of weeks. Neighbors don't know where they can be reached, says Mrs. Strange." Sloat guessed she was the little lady.

Brady was back with Sloat's camera case, which Sloat supposed he'd looked in. He put it near Sloat's feet.

"Ann Miles showed you a house on Lawler?" Yes. "You got the license of her late-model Toyota?" Yes, it was somewhere in his car, which was down at the shopping center. If that was where the PacBank building was.

Sloan stood up, so Sloat did, too, with his case. Brady slid the glass door shut and flipped a lock. Out the front door at the curb sat an unmarked blue Ford. Sloat got in back with Canfield.

Brady drove to Lawler and Sloat told him south, second block on the right, and to pull up at the brown house with the thin tree by the driveway. Sloan got out and at the door talked to a middle-aged, trim woman.

He came back and Brady got on the road to the shopping center. Sloan said, "They're the Bennetts. They've lived there fifteen years. She says they don't know a girl like you and Mrs. Strange describe. Or a white Toyota." Grey gaze was over the seat at Sloat. "You don't know this woman, never saw or heard of her before yesterday. Today she brings you to a strange house in a strange town and tries to kill you."

Sloat said that seemed to be the story.

Sloan turned front, gazed out the window. He had neatly parted black hair, no bald spot. The back of his head was thoughtful-looking.

Sloat pointed over Brady's right shoulder and he pulled up near the Pinto.

In a minute, Sloat found among debris on the seat the scrap of

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envelope with the license number he'd jotted, readable. Sloan took it. "Do you want to follow us?" Sloat's opinion was that he didn't have a real choice . . .

The Police Department was on a downtown street. Next to it was a garage, which he pulled into behind the Ford, Brady waving him where to put the Pinto.

He didn't lock it, but went with Brady through an inside door into the station, where he was photoed and printed, and booked on suspicion of illegal entry and conspiracy to commit a felony.

His tank had about fifteen other guests. He got a bottom bunk, fairly comfortable, with a brown blanket and a styro pad for a pillow.

That night he lay and thought about how Ann Miles had fed him fiction which money made real, which he'd followed to within a split-second of her dynamite ending, when Lord of the Flies popped up in his viewfinder—which, if not, he'd be lying in the county morgue, not jail.

Friday passed as it does in jail. Also the weekend. He ate and dozed and pondered about Ann Miles and Lord of the Flies and George and Alice and the Kennedys and the Bennetts and Mrs. Strange and Sergeant Sloan, and life and sudden death and sleaze, and his fifteen years in L.A. Sunday afternoon the Dodgers were on TV against somebody.

Monday afternoon Sloan appeared at the bars and asked how he was making it.

He said not bad.

Sloan said that the license check had turned up an '87 Toyota registered to Ann Miles of Long Beach, who a detective in that town talked to. She was a black woman living with her husband and three children who early in June had reported the theft of her car from a thrift-store lot in Long Beach. She admitted she'd left her key-ring with her ID in the ignition.

So Sloat's woman had stolen Ann Miles' car and her name.

Sloan said that in the Kennedys' neighborhood nobody knew a woman as described. Local hospitals and schools had no Randons or Mileses working for them.

Sloat asked how long Sloan was going to hold him.

"Till the Kennedys get back," Sloan said. "I'd like them to take a look at you."

"They don't know me. But they may know her. When are they coming back?"

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"Neighbors think maybe tomorrow."

"Did this make local news?"

Sloan told him no.

Sloat guessed Sloan or somebody had sat on it, not for his sake but because the Kennedys, of a good address, might not appreciate a half story about an L.A. fringe dick caught in their closet with a shot-up camera.

Tuesday passed. Wednesday after lunch a deputy took him to a bright cubicle with black glass on one side. He guessed Sloan had the Kennedys out there eyeballing him. Shortly he was back in his tank.

Soon a deputy came and took him to a room where another deputy gave him his clothes. After a shower, he got dressed.

At the front desk, a cop said, "Sloan wants you to wait." He gave him his wallet, keys, and the rest, had him count the money ($80.00 in the wallet plus $4.53 from his pocket) and sign that he'd got it. The cop gave him a slip to give the guy in the garage.

Sloat went to a chair off to the side and in ten minutes or so came Sloan, grey jacket and blue shirt and tie this time, blue pants and good black shoes. "Let's go get a sandwich," he said. "I haven't had lunch."

They walked past the garage, Sloan setting the pace and direction. It was a day with a nice sea breeze. Southern California has clean, lively air on the coast. In L.A., five million cars put out what twelve million sets of lungs suck in and mix with each person's private rage, hope, hopelessness, greed, booze, nicotine, any other drug of choice, junkfood, love, hate, lovelessness, forlornery, frustration, and insanity, and send back to hang in the dead air for everyone else to suck in and mix. Noplace like L.A., thought Sloat, and after fifteen years it's in you, all that mix—it's you and you're it.

Sloan said, "The Kennedys don't know you and have no idea who she is. They say nothing was stolen and they're not going to push any charges on you. They've fixed the window and changed the locks."

A little way into the second block he said, "Mrs. Miles got her car back." On Monday night in the Calley lot on Washington, cops had found it—cleaned and vacuumed, no prints and no scraps of anything. It was locked and the key-ring was in the glove compartment.

"Huh," said Sloat.

Sloan turned into a sandwich shop called Mary May's, with blue-check tablecloths and genuine napkins. Only a few customers were

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there at 2:00 P.M. At the counter, a plump grey woman Sloan called Sammy fixed him a ham and tomato on white and the same for Sloat, who wasn't hungry but felt it would be polite to have something. They got coffee from a set-up, Sloan paying and leading to a table by itself.

They ate a while. Then Sloan laid down his sandwich. "Yesterday I went to Calley's to see if anybody there or at any of the shops might know her as an employee or customer. Nobody did. I happened to have your keys with me, so I went on to your place and talked to people there. Then I went up and took a look at your room."

Sloat asked politely, "Find anything interesting?"

"Your .38 in the bureau, where you'd said. And *Lord of the Flies* on your bed."

Sloat got a strange feeling that the reason they were in Mary May's eating sandwiches was because Sloan had found *Lord of the Flies* on his bed.

Which was a fact if not a reason. If last Thursday just before leaving, *Lord of the Flies* hadn't gone from his shelf to his bed, he wouldn't be sitting here.

He mentioned that. Sloan was interested. Sloat told how he'd selected the book by accident and had glanced at the drawing which had lunged up in his viewfinder and knocked him sideways just as Ann fired.

Sloan finished his sandwich and wiped his fingers on his genuine napkin, then sat a while, sipping coffee with cream and gazing at Sloat with a lot of thought in the grey eyes. Sammy came around filling cups. Sloan murmured, "*Lord of the Flies* helped set you up, then changed his mind and saved you." He had a slight smile. "Nice ending—but we'd have to fill in a lot to get there."

Sloat wasn't following, he was still on the previous remark. "What do you mean, he helped set me up?"

"Golding says there's a beast in all of us—what Freud called the Id."

"Did he?"

"Yes. You've read the book?"

"Oh, yeah—I know what Golding said, but I never knew he was talking about the Id—I never knew what it was."

From his jacket Sloan pulled an off-white, somewhat beat-up paperback *Lord of the Flies*, a different edition than Sloat's, the cover featuring a red sketch of a young boy clutching his head in mortal agony. Opening it near the end, he flipped back a few pages. "This

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is a short windup essay by a scholar named Epstein. It's his view of what Golding is getting at." He offered the book to Sloat, long slim finger halfway down a page.

Sloat scanned a few words that were underlined in pencil, picking up "anarchic, amoral, driving force that Freudians call the Id," then "single-minded tenacity." Getting into the flow of words, he read an underlined paragraph:

"The tenets of civilization, the moral and social codes, the Ego, the intelligence itself, form only a veneer over this white-hot power, this uncontrollable force, 'the fury and mire of human veins.' "

He blinked at Sloan, who gazed mildly back. "Is this your underlining?"

Sloan nodded. "A long time ago."

Sloat went back to the essay. Epstein was saying that Dostoyevsky found salvation and damnation in the white-hot power, which was apparently Golding's beast and Freud's Id, that Yeats found it the only source of creative genius and Conrad was appalled by this "heart of darkness." —"The emergence of this concealed, basic wildness," said Epstein, "is the theme of this book."

Sloat handed it back. It hit him that the not real Ann Miles had used the phrase "moral code" in describing Alice's and George's condition—trapped in it and habit, they didn't know how to break free. Her eyes had gone drifty when she'd said that the great fear was finding out who you really are.

So she'd been talking about herself. Her words connected with Epstein's. Or that was all fiction and nonsense, or fiction and reality. He shook his head, letting Sloan know that what was clear to Sloan wasn't to him.

Sloan said, "You never knew her. She had nothing to gain by setting you up, spending three hundred on the project, luring you here, shooting you. Why?" Sloat shook his head, watching Sloan's long fingers lightly tapping the book by his plate. "Say she read this, and it hit her hard—or just say she's a very troubled woman who thought that if she freed her beast, she could free herself from fear and craziness."

Sloat said, "She talked about breaking free of habit and the moral code—using that phrase, but putting it on George and Alice."

Sloan nodded slowly. "Just about always we're talking about ourselves. I'm doing it now, putting my own thoughts onto your woman. Whether this book hit her hard or she even read it, it hit *me* hard the first time I read it."

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Sloat didn't say anything. He wasn't getting all of this but some of it. He drank coffee and was quiet. So was Sloan. Then Sloat said, "Why me?"

"As victim?" Sloan shrugged. "Start with the thought that she wants to free her beast—and herself. How? Murder. Who? Private detectives have a reputation as loners, willing to go places, do odd things. She thinks up a story that kind of holds together if not looked at too close and baits it with money. Maybe she calls some detectives who aren't right for one reason or another, maybe some turn her down—she sounds you out, meets you, you feel right, she dangles money, gives you the story. You know it rings phony and she knows you know that, she intended that, but if you go along with it it's not just her working you but both of you working out the fiction. So she's certain you're the chosen one, the chosen victim."

Sloat blew a long breath. "You really think that?"

Sloan had his slight smile. "I'm not thinking, I'm following a fiction trail. So don't take it seriously, though it has a certain elfin charm." His eyes were amused over his coffee cup.

Sloat was quiet. Sloan said, "You have a lot of Civil War books that give the reasons for it—political, economic, social. Not so, say Golding, Freud, Conrad. War is beyond reason. The Civil War wasn't inevitable—common sense and reason could have stopped it, but nobody really wanted to till far too late. War is great sport—it's pure joy to free the beast and serve him until he's full of blood and sleepy until next time. So there will always be wars, because the beast is in each of us."

Sammy came around again. They each signaled half and got full.

Sloat asked, "How'd she know the Kennedys were away?"

"Let's try fiction." Sloan was quiet a few seconds, rubbing his hands slowly, like they sparked ideas. "Say she was cruising towns, looking for a nice setting for her big murder scene. The weekend before she called you, she happens to be on their block and everyone's car is in the drive except theirs. Her antennae are out, she gets the feel of an empty house. She rings a bell, asks if her friends the Randons live there, learns no and that the people are off to Hawaii for a few weeks."

Sloat said, "So later that night she sneaks in the back yard and breaks the bathroom window?"

"Looks like it. That's not fiction, the window was broken. The Kennedys said it wasn't when they left."

"So she gets in, decides the place will do fine, and goes to L.A. to

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find the sucker who'll play corpse in her big production." He blew a sigh. "And the Kennedys come home and find me in the closet—what's her point in that?"

"She'd think that was nice—decent people who'd lived by the moral code all their lives come home to a dead body with flies. No reason, no logic, no meaning. That would be her point." He looked at his watch, so did Sloat his, and saw they'd been forty minutes. Sloan slid the book in his jacket, ready to move. Sloat asked, "What now?"

"Nothing. No leads. She could be in L.A., Long Beach, Mobile, Alabama, anywhere." They got up, and Sloat said, "She might call me."

"She might." Sloan left a nice tip. Behind the counter Sammy beamed them goodbye.

Sloat said, "If she does, I'll call you."

They walked back to the station. Sloat said, "Thanks for the discourse."

Sloan smiled. "My pleasure." He tapped his jacket. "I rarely get to sound off on one of my favorite insight books." They paused at the garage and he said, "I hope she does call you. Good fiction murders should have everything worked out and tied up."

"This wasn't a murder."

"You can thank the Lord for that." Sloan nodded and walked away toward the station, a lean man in good clothes with calm grey eyes.

In the garage, Sloat gave the cop the receipt and shortly was southbound for L.A.

A Saturday early in July he was on the bed, reading Ellery Queen's *Calamity Town*, always a pleasure. EQ, the detective, followed logic, the Op went by feel. Each was right for himself, different fictions by different writers each on his own route. The phone buzzed. He reached, said "Hello."

A fretful woman's voice said, "Sloat Confidential?"

"No, they've gone out of business."

"I got their name in the book. Did you take over? I mean, are you a detective service?"

"No, I work in a warehouse."

"Why do you have their number?"

"I'm sort of waiting for a call."

"Fine. I spend money because you're waiting for a call."

Sloat said he was sorry. She said he ought to think of other people. He said politely, "Have you lived long in L.A.?"

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"Long enough. I got nothing but grief and hell here."

"It's kind of in the air."

She said, "Huh," and hung up.

"'Bye," said Sloat, and hung up.

A week or so passed. He got some other calls, similar, none from his last client.

He called the Ventura PD and got Sergeant Sloan, told him there'd be no neat ending, no verification of his Golding-Freud-Conrad theory, just questions left hanging.

Sloan said, "That's life. Fiction's much more satisfying."

He asked how Sloat was doing. Sloat said he'd quit sleuthing for a while, to clear his head of a lot of debris, and was working in a warehouse. Maybe he'd stay with it—he didn't want to hide in any more closets, that he was sure of.

"You hit your bottom, huh?"

"For now, anyway," Sloat conceded.

Sloan said to stop in if he ever got to Ventura. Sloat said he would, and that he owed him a lunch.

A few days later he called the phone company and got a new number.

ON OUR COVER

Before his tremendous success as the star of CBS Television's *Magnum PI,* Tom Selleck modeled and played smaller roles in the movies (*Coma, Myra Breckenridge,* etc.). He starred in the box-office hit *Three Men and a Baby,* and can currently be seen in the comedy-thriller *Her Alibi* as a mystery writer with writer's block. Last year he became the father of a daughter, Hannah.

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TAKE PICTURES for profit. Try our unique methods. Write: Camera Ventures, Box 771, Lamar, CO 81052.

GET PAID assembling products at home. Send $2.00 with sase: Henley, Box 742, Pocono Summit, PA 18346.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations . . . Closeouts . . . Job Lots . . . Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49422.

CLOSEOUTS! Discounts! Below wholesale! Liquidations! Freebies! All kinds! Information (Stamp): DDN, Box 20152-D, Ferndale, Michigan 48220.

FIREWORKS—huge selection—lowest prices—free catalog. Write: KELLNER'S FIREWORKS, Box 67, Oil City, PA 16301.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets. Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, NC 28560.

BECOME A Paralegal. Work with Attorneys. Outstanding Home Study Program. Free Catalogue. 1-800-223-4542. Dept. LE174.

HIGH School At Home. No Classes. Diploma awarded. Low tuition. Send for brochure. Call any time. 1-800-228-5600 or write American School Dept. 388, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

FINANCIAL

LOANS Available for small business! Call Federal Loan Information: 1-(800)366-6639 for immediate details.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send $19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 7058, Red Oak, IA 51591.

JEWELRY

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. $.55 Dozen. $.25 gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-910 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW $50,000 "OVERNIGHT." Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SP, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

CASH GRANTS available from nonprofit foundations! Never Repay! 340 sources/application instructions—$3.00. Fundsearch, Box 19107-SP, Washington, DC 20036.

BORROW $100.-$50,000. ON SIGNATURE! No Collateral. Free Brochure! Sase, #640-067(C3), 117 West Harrison, Chicago 60605.

BORROW $100-$100,000! Fast, Confidential! Glendale, Box 260279, Plano, TX 75026. (214) 596-1615.

MAILING LISTS

NEW NAMES DAILY! MIXED STATES! IMMEDIATE SHIPMENT! Adhesive Labels; Guaranteed/Hot Line Opportunity Seekers. 200/$10; 500/$15; 1000/$25. Others Available. Advon, Drawer B27, Shelley, ID 83274. Visa/MC/AmEx. 1-800-992-3866.

NEW NAMES! (100,000) each month! Computerized labels. Guaranteed deliverable! Dealer's Co-Op: 1-800-992-9405/1-219-838-7099.

PRIME SOURCE NAMES! UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY SEEKERS/MLM'ERS. FREE SAMPLE! VENTURE-LI, BOX 336, RIVIERA, AZ 86442.

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MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls," Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publictions. For your copy send $3.25 (includes postage) to Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for $500.00 weekly? Send six 25¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

"JANITORIAL BUSINESS MONEYMAKING SECRETS." Free Report! Make $25,000-$100,000+ annually! MBM, Box 159D, Junction City, CA 96048.

MAKE BALLOON ANIMALS. $400.00 Weekends! FREE SAMPLES/INSTRUCTIONS: Showcase—IO94, Box 250, Alexandria Bay, NY 13607.

DISSATISFIED? Need More Money? Part-time work, full-time income! Work from home or apartment! Can be done entirely by mail! No products to sell. No bookkeeping or inventory. Male or female. No experience necessary. Write to Mike Tipton, Dept. M1, POB 624, Lima, Ohio 45802-0624.

FLOWER ARRANGING. Remarkable, easy home moneymaking opportunity. Free Details. ERN, Box 3236, Skokie, IL 60076.

EXTRA Money—Make money in your spare time. Turn a hobby into a money making venture. Satisfaction guaranteed. Send $3.00: Gallery of Treasures, 234a Eastmoor, East Alton, IL 62024.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

WE buy Newspaper Clippings of Wedding Announcements for $1.00 Each. Instructions $2.00. Clippings, Box 491A2, Gatesville, Texas 76528.

ADVERTISE FREE in 507 magazines and newspapers. Directory, Box 11R, Atlanta, Georgia 30301.

$1,000's Weekly!! Processing Mail! Start immediately! Free Supplies/Postage! No experience! No obligation! JRB, Box 3349-IOM, Danbury, CT 06813.

"FLEA MARKET PROFITS:" FREE Report Includes Ideas, Tips, Merchandise Sources. O'Donnell's, 9-IN Sewanois, Lincoln Park, NJ 07035.

$1000 Per 1000 Envelopes stuffed. Free Supplies. Send Sase: Adams Enterprises, 8760-A Research Blvd., #286, Austin, TX 78758.

HOW to win playing slot machines! Free report. Medusa, Dept. 38, 2817 Capitol, Des Moines, IA 50317.

STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS. FREE Subscription to Opportunity Magazine tells how. Write: Opportunity , Dept. P34, 6 N. Michigan, Chicago, IL 60602.

HUNDRED$ Weekly working at home! Legal, practical opportunities. Free Details! Send SASE: DLL-AC ENTERPRISES, 1546 Ridgeview, Traverse City, MI 49684.

NEW Plan for Financial Success! Have a second income or total financial Freedom. Save on everyday and special purchases also! $5.00 (refundable) brings complete information. Summit Publishing, D-8307, P.O. Box 6062, Akron, Ohio 44312.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

BE Assertive! Informative manual shows how. Send $4.50: Atek, 2452 State Road 7, Margate, Florida 33063 Suite 105-Q.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

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PERSONAL

PEN PALS Are Warm Friendly People Of All Ages Looking To Make Friends And Share Adventures With You. Now Is Your Chance To Join An International Club. Send $1.00 For The Application That May Change Your Life To: World Wide Pen Pals, Box 12773-M, Phila., PA 19134.

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity. Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

CREATE A NEW IDENTITY. Untraceable. Confidential. Foolproof. ID 4, P.O. Box 25768, St. Louis, MO 63136.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

SINGLES Introduction Service. Write to: Meet-By-Mail, 16016 S.E. Division #165, Portland, Oregon 97236.

DO YOU KNOW "How to Write a Classified Ad that Pulls?" Instructive booklet tells how. Also includes a certificate worth $5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send $3.25 (includes postage) to: DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

CHRISTIAN SINGLES OUTREACH. Local/Worldwide—Phone/Mail Introductions. Free Information/Fast Service. Write: Box 9020-EQ, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

BEAUTIFUL, ENGLISH SPEAKING, FILIPINAS want men of all ages as Life-partners. VIDEOS AVAILABLE. PAL, 51 BLANCA, CO 81123-0084.

FIND An Oriental Dream Wife. I did, Any Man Can! Oriental, Box 2109-K, Beaverton, Oregon 97075.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

BECOME a Real Estate Appraiser or Property Manager. Home Study. Free Information. 1-800-223-4542 Dept. RE174.

TAPES AND CASSETES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

FOUR HOURS SUSPENSE. Travelin' Tales - nine famous mysteries on stereo cassettes for drivers. $14.97. Storey Tehler Productions, 56 Snowapple Lane,Milford, CT 06460.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at 40¢ each
Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ _____
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months = $144.00 x .85 = $122.40)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York, 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A., 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

Join me on Secretary's Day!

On Secretary's Day, April 26, you have the chance to make a difference in the lives of 11 million Americans who are afflicted with diabetes.

Your support on just this one day could help bring an end to this devastating disease and its complications of heart disease, kidney failure, blindness—even death.

So on April 26, please ask your boss to make a donation in your name to the JUVENILE DIABETES FOUNDATION *and I'll send you a personal thank you and a certificate*.

You can make the difference—Support JDF. For more information call 1-800-JDF-CURE or write:

JDF International
The Diabetes Research Foundation
432 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

Susan Ruttan

Susan Ruttan, Chairman,
National Secretary's Day for
The Juvenile Diabetes Foundation

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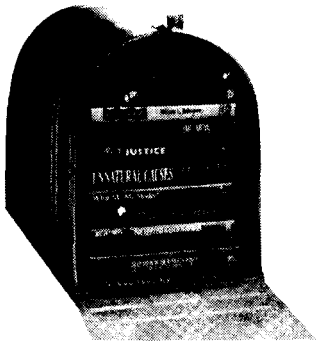
12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES JUST $1



A $197.40 VALUE IN ORIGINAL PUBLISHERS' EDITIONS

That's right! We'd like you to enjoy $197.40 worth of great new mystery and suspense stories, as your introduction to The Detective Book Club . . . *for over 45 years, the unsurpassed value leader in mystery fiction.*

All 12 intriguing novels will be delivered to you in 4 specially-designed, easy-to-read triple-volumes, available exclusively from The Detective Book Club for *only $1 plus shipping.*

Top Quality Selections at Unbeatable Prices

As a member you'll forget daily cares as you solve baffling murder cases, suspenseful whodunits, tense courtroom conflicts and more, all featuring the challenging plots and gripping action that are the hallmarks of today's most read mystery masters like Julian Symons, Ellis Peters, Donald E. Westlake plus many others . . . chosen for Club members by our expert editors from among the more-than-400 mysteries published each year.

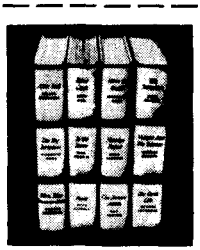
Best of all, each monthly Club selection (described in advance) is offered to you at *unequalled savings.* As a member, you're guaranteed 60% . . . and often 70%, 80% or more . . . off the original publishers' prices. Each selection includes three newly-published novels in one handsome hardbound triple-volume edition for *only $11.95. That's just $3.99 per full-length mystery!*

No Risk, No Obligation

When you become a member of The Detective Book Club, there is *no minimum* number of books you must buy. You may reject any book *before or after* you receive it. You may cancel your membership at any time, with no obligation. It's that simple.

Send No Money Now

Simply fill out the coupon on this page and return it to The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576. You'll enjoy a *10 day free trial* to examine the evidence and judge for yourself. ***But act now!*** If you love great mysteries, it would be a crime not to accept this offer.



Yes, please enroll me as a member and send me my 4 triple-volumes shown here, containing 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for 10 days, then will either accept all 4 volumes for only $1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's Preview describing my next selections. I will always have at least 30 days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 30 days and owe nothing. For each triple-volume I keep, I will send you just $11.95 plus shipping. I understand there are no minimum number of books I must buy and I may cancel my membership at any time.

89-FS
D29M1Z

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576

Since 1942, the best way to get more mystery for your money.

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

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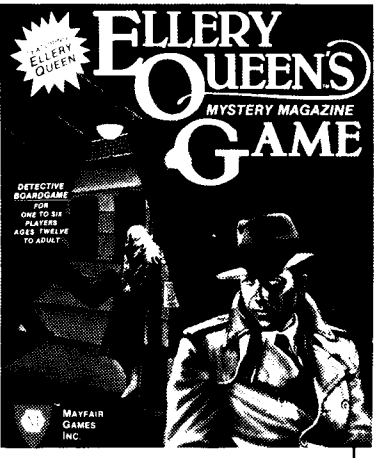
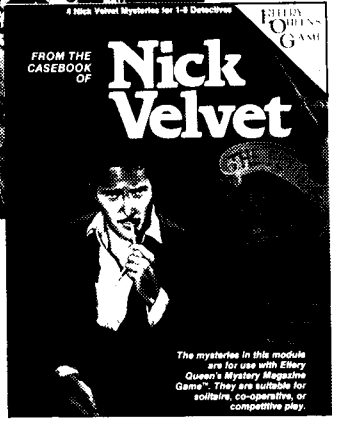
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE GAME



Trace the paths of crime through the dark alleys of Manhattan, the seemingly peaceful streets of a small college town, or the shadowy corners of a private mansion. Delve into any of the five intriguing mysteries included in the master set by yourself, or with up to five fellow detectives. Design your own cases with the game's clear and concise rules.

4 Dan Fortune Mysteries for 1-6 Detectives
FROM THE CASEBOOK OF MICHAEL COLLINS
DAN FORTUNE
Game Stories by Debbie Christian


4 Nick Velvet Mysteries for 1-6 Detectives
FROM THE CASEBOOK OF
Nick Velvet
The mysteries in this module are for use with Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine Game™. They are suitable for solitaire, co-operative, or competitive play.

For more intrigue.....

Try these two casebooks of classic mysteries. Each contains four puzzling cases, which, when used with the master set, create an exciting evening of adventure.

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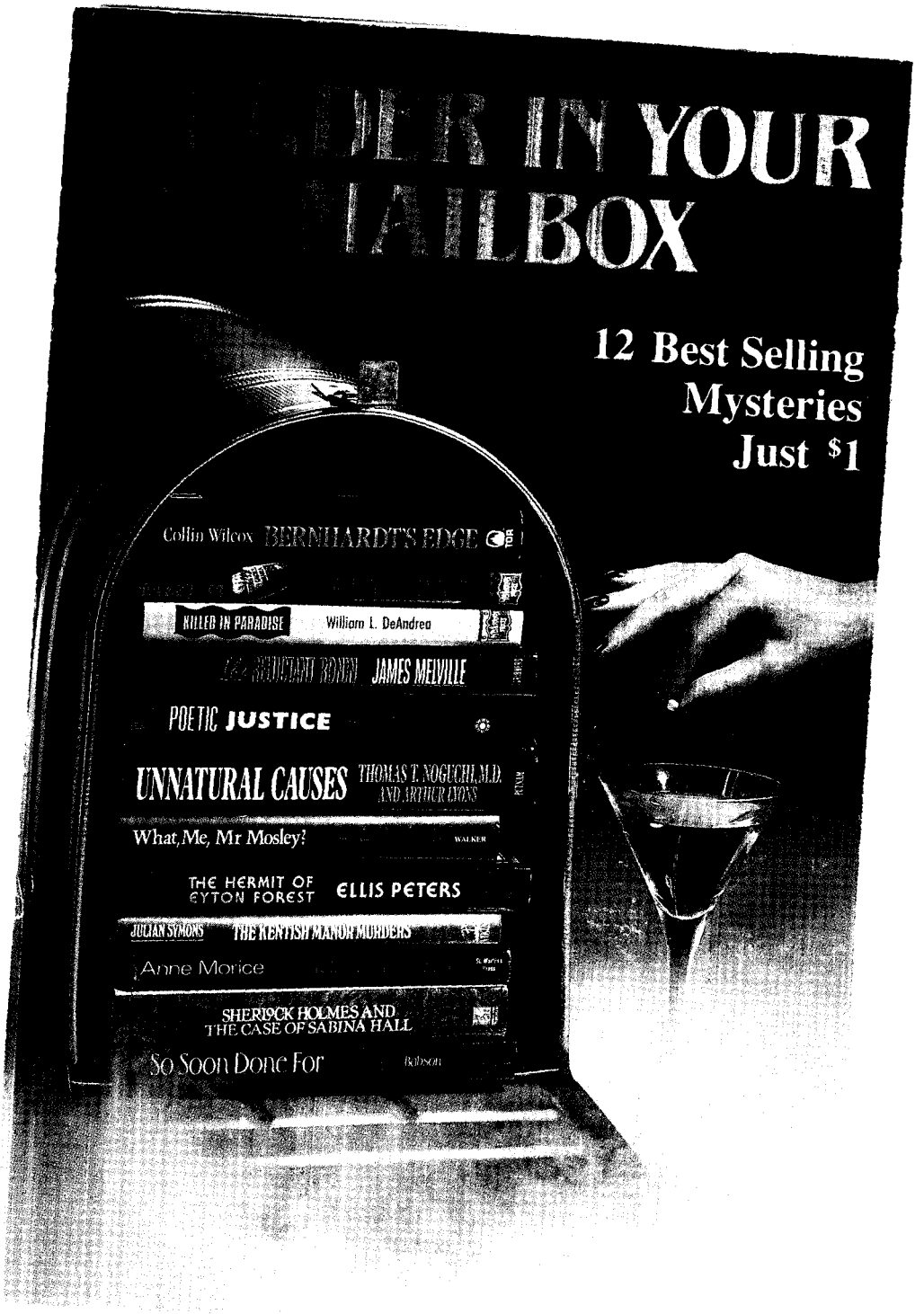

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